





R.B.A N.M'S H.S (M) LIBRARY

Blore-42

Accession No:

1704

U.D.C No:

8-31/MBH

N06

Date;

5.7.81



A  
GOLDEN SHADOW.

Acc 05/12

BY  
L. T. MEADE,

AUTHOR OF  
"THE MEDICINE LADY," "A DWELLER IN TENTS,"  
ETC., ETC.

R. B. A. I. T. S. H. S. (M) LIBRA

Blore 42

Accession No; 1704

ILLUSTRATED. 9-31

Date; 5-7-12

LONDON:  
WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED.

1906.



R.B.A.N.M'S H.S (M) LIBRARY

Blore-42

Accession No ; 1704

U.D.C. No : 8-31/MEA

Date; 5.2.81

N 05

1402

D-53

2



~~1654~~

~~1654~~





E/S

# A GOLDEN SHADOW.

---

## CHAPTER I.

1684

THE house was small and was situated in a back street. There are very shabby back streets, even in Kensington, and this house, built about thirty years ago, was already showing signs of wear and tear. In its day, it had been somewhat pretentious, having a stuccoed front, an attempt at pillars, and a deep archway over the front door. Even thirty years of life is old for some houses in London; and when Maurice Sherwood brought Ursula, his young wife, home from her wedding tour, he had been greatly taken by the house in question. It was one of a terrace and yet was itself detached. He had secured it at a higher rent than was quite prudent for him to pay; and Ursula—tall, rosy-faced and



blooming—had taken gay possession of the little dwelling.

She was a girl of excellent taste, with much tact, and the power of making ten pence do the work of a shilling. The terrace in which she and her husband lived was called Asprey Gardens. In the old days, when the little house first stood forth in all its freshness, it had been known as York Row. But an ambitious modern builder had bought up the houses, painted and whitened some of them, and changed the name to Asprey Gardens as a more taking address for the tenants he hoped to find.

“There is nothing like make believe,” he had said to himself, “and if a man or a woman sees ‘Asprey Gardens’ on the address, it will in a sort of way remind him of gardens and flowers. That is the next best thing, surely, to possessing them.”

It *was* the next best thing, and was also as far from the reality as anything in this world could be. For not a blade of grass grew in Asprey Gardens, and the only view Ursula could see from her drawing-room windows was a high, very high, blank wall.



The Gardens ran parallel with the wall, and at the other side was a huge brewery, which sometimes emitted smells the reverse of savoury, and caused the young wife—who would not complain for all the world—to long for a dwelling where flowers of the simplest sort might sometimes be seen, and where country fields might greet her tired eyes.

But Ursula, who was married at twenty, was not going to complain. She loved her husband with all her heart, soul, and strength. She had three sweet children, and was now approaching her twenty-eighth year. The children did occasionally see some poor attempts at flowers in the window boxes. But a sort of effluvia from the brewery generally managed to stunt their blossom and to cause them to wither before their time.

It was not, however, very far from Asprey Gardens to the real and lovely Kensington Gardens. There was no mistake with regard to flowers and trees and round ponds and prettily dressed children and green—green most verdant—grass in Kensington Gardens. Here the little Sherwoods enjoyed all the



delight of perfect childhood ; and Ursula often said to her husband that Asprey Gardens was quite worth even an additional five pounds a year because of its neighbourhood to the real gardens so close to Hyde Park.

Things went quite happily with Sherwood and his young wife ; Ursula managed to stretch and pull and contrive with a tiny income so as just to make both ends meet during the first few years of their marriage ; and it was not until baby Laurence appeared on the scene that there was even a shadow of cloud in her happy sky.

It is often the very best thing in all the world for a good girl's character when she loves a man devotedly and marries him while he is poor. Ursula never regretted the day when she left her rich relations and took up her abode with Maurice Sherwood. She infinitely preferred poverty with him to riches with the Langtons. But there is such a thing as having an income which is barely sufficient while things go well with you, but which no longer meets even the most frugal expense when calamity steps in.



Ursula was quite well again after the birth of baby Laurence. The doctor had been paid, the nurse dismissed. The excellent and well trained girl who had managed Herbert and little Margaret was only too delighted to help her mistress with the baby. Ursula felt a passion of fresh love, of fresh delight over the beautiful boy ; as far as she was concerned, life was still all roses. Life might have continued all roses, but for the sudden and serious illness of Maurice Sherwood. He was the sub-editor of a flourishing weekly paper, but to be editor of a paper by no means proves you a rich man. Sherwood received two hundred pounds per annum for his editorial work, and although the articles he wrote brought him in fifty or sixty pounds more, it must be quickly perceived that the money with which he faced the world was of the sort which can never be put by for a rainy day.

On a certain evening, when the new baby was three months old, when winter was approaching, when fires were a necessity, and the household expenses must somehow meet the severity of London fogs and London



cold, the tired man entered the little home with burning eyes and an aching head.

"Oh, it is nothing, darling," he said to Ursula as she looked at him—not in dismay, for she was far too brave for that, but nevertheless with anxiety. "I will go to bed early, for I cannot even think of work to-night; but I shall be as fit as a trivet in the morning."

Ursula saw that the fire was lit in her husband's bedroom—an unheard of extravagance. She helped him to bed, got him something warm to drink, and stood by his side.

"Why," he said, smiling at her, "we have never had a fire in this room before."

"No," she said, with an equal smile, "we are both so strong as a rule. But this fire is really a godsend, Maurice, for it will air the room finely for the winter."

"And add to the expense of the coal bill," he could not help murmuring.

Ursula shook her hand at him playfully.

"Who has a right to make himself comfortable, when he really wants it, but the dear, darling fellow who earns



everything?" she said, kissing him with great affection.

She was startled at the hot forehead which her lips touched, but as Maurice had never been seriously ill before she trusted for the best. Alas for her hopes!

The poor young wife found this one fire was the first of a series of similar fires, for Sherwood was delirious by the morning, and the doctor had to be summoned. For six weeks he lay between life and death, but at last, worn out and spent, crept back to life again.

His post had been filled on the weekly paper, but the proprietor had sent him fifty pounds in lieu of notice, and a warm assurance that he would do his best to get him another post when he was well again. Ursula would allow none but herself to nurse her husband. Expenses were kept down for the rest of the household, but the sick man wanted for nothing.

"He shall live and get strong again, if I starve for it," she thought.

At last the crisis was past, recovery came slowly back, and it was just about this time



that Christmas (so happy when you are well, and have little children to love, and money enough to meet expenses, but so black and terrible when the purse is empty and the heart low) drew near.

"I will come downstairs on Christmas Day," said Sherwood to his wife. "We'll have a real good time, and the children must have some sort of Christmas tree. Herbert did so enjoy it last year. You might spend five shillings on them, Ursula. You can get a shopful of penny toys for five shillings."

"Oh, the toys can be managed—yes, yes," she said.

She had said "Yes" to every suggestion made by her husband for some time past. Her one object was to keep all anxiety from him until, as she expressed it, he was "out of the wood."

He had not the slightest idea that he had lost his post, and she resolved to say nothing on the subject until Christmas Day had gone by.

"It is nice to get well again," he said on this occasion, as he hungrily attacked a great bowl of fragrant beef tea. "And such



a little wife as I possess is worth struggling to stay with. I am getting back health by leaps and bounds. I will send a line to Brompton" (Brompton was the name of the proprietor of the journal) "and tell him that I shall be quite fit to go back to work early in the year."

"But you won't be fit then, darling," said Ursula, turning her back quickly on him in order that he should not notice how very white her face had gone. "The doctor says that it would be madness for you to work until the spring."

Sherwood laughed.

"Upon my word!" he said, "I think some of these medical men are fools. How would he manage, I wonder, if he had no patients, and therefore no fees coming in? A man can only do the best in his power and trust to Providence. Do you know, Ursula, that once or twice, when I was at my worst, I had a fearful dread that Brompton would dismiss me. Of course he wouldn't, for I have served him faithfully. But there are some who would not be so considerate. Brompton is a good sort."



"Oh, yes," she said faintly.

How well she knew that the notice, along with the cheque, had long ago been forwarded.

"I think, Ursula," said her husband, "that I might manage just a line to thank Brompton for his forbearance and to assure him that I will serve him better than ever when once I get well again. Eh, little woman? do you think I am strong enough?"

"You are not—and you are not to do it," she said stoutly. "*I* will write to him—if you wish it, I will write to-night. Oh, do put all these horrid business cares out of your head, darling. You know perfectly well that you are not fit even to think of them. I want you to see baby, and little Mags and Herbert. You shall play with them while I run downstairs and see about your next meal."

Sherwood smiled. It had been an effort even to think of Brompton and the toil and drudgery of his daily work. He was only too glad to bask in the comfortable present; and when Herbert and Maggie peeped joyously round the screen which kept the



draught from the easy chair in which he was bolstered up, he greeted them with all the rapture of a devoted father.

“Eh, my sweets? I am better,” he said. “No, you mustn’t be rough with poor old dad just for the present. He can’t have noisy games yet. But they’re all coming back again. I’ll be as fit as a trivet in no time, my little ones. Maggie, sit close to me and tell me what you have been doing all these weary days.”

“I will tell you, father,” said Herbert, in the decided voice of a very manly child of seven. “We’ve been playing with our bricks and——”

“Oh!” said Maggie. “Making believe, ’oo know.”

“Making believe?” asked Sherwood.

“Yes, we had to—of course we had,” said Maggie. “We made believe that we was in a garden, and there was *lots* of fairies, and—and—muzzer was the keen of them all! You see we had to, dad, acause——”

“Hush!” said Herbert.

He put his hand across Maggie’s cherub



mouth. She got very red, and pushed the hand away.

“ Whatever is it, Mags ? ” asked Sherwood.

“ Only you see, dad, we wouldn’t have had a zolly time if we did not have the pretty fairies to help us—it was muzzer she told us to make up about different fairies, and arter that, fazer, we didn’t mind nozink ! ”

Herbert looked intensely anxious while his little sister was speaking.

“ Better not talk so much, Mags,” he said, “ I’ll tell father the ’portant things. Father, I learnt ‘ John Gilpin,’ and I can say him to you, and I have got a beautiful prize in the kindergarten, a box of tools. I can hammer now, and I am making a lovely box for the toys.”

“ Ess,” interrupted Maggie, “ it’s kite booful, and I am washing the toys and making ’em ’ook so nice. Father, the box will be finished Kismas Day, and you will see the toys put in on Kismas Day.”

“ Mags, you really do talk too much,” said Herbert in a solemn tone. “ She’s making you tired, isn’t she, father ? ”

“ I isn’t, is I, fazer ? ” enquired Maggie,



with her charming dimpled face turned a little sideways, and her great eyes fixed on her father's faded face.

"No, no, Mags, you are just perfect," said the tired voice.

"But, father," said Herbert, who was very precocious for his age, "mother said you weren't to talk. Say, Mags—let's tell him a story."

"I know," said Maggie, "that one about the white fairies."

"Yes," said Herbert, beginning at once. "There was a tall fairy and there was a little one. The tall one was most beautiful."

"Nearly as booful as muzzer," said Maggie.

"Now, Mag, you are not to interrupt."

"What's 'rupt?" questioned Maggie.

"You are to let me speak. I'm the oldest, and I know how. Father, the fairies came the night that you were so bad, for you know, father, you were awful bad."

"You was near going up 'way to God," said Maggie. "You was near having wings. Wouldn't it have been funny to fy? I'd 'ike to.fy."

"Father wouldn't like it," said Herbert.



“Father’s a man, and he’s sensible. Father would say, ‘What would become of my little children and their dear mother?’ That’s what father would say, wouldn’t you, father?”

“I think so,” answered Sherwood, a lump in his throat; “but go on with your story, my boy.”

“It was that night. Mother didn’t cry a bit,” said Herbert. “She came into our nursery and she told us we were to pray to God for you and then we were to pray for her and for ourselves, and then we were to think of the white fairies. It was I who made up the story about the white fairies,” continued Herbert, a modest flush upon his cheeks.

“Ess,” said Mags, “and after that we only laughed; we laughed and laughed, and we wasn’t a bit frightened, and we knew fazer wouldn’t fy ’way up to God.”

“For, you see,” said Herbert, “it was the tallest of the fairies told us so. I made believe that two of ’em come into the room.”

“Poor baby didn’t know nussin’, o’ course,” said Maggie.



“No, baby didn’t know,” said Herbert ;  
“but they come in, and the oldest sat down by Mag and the biggest stood by me, and we began to talk to them, they was so real.”

“Zeal as possible,” said Maggie.

“And we asked them—‘Is our father going to die?’ and they said, ‘Oh, dear no, quite impossible.’”

“Quite impossible,” said Maggie

“And afterwards they told us about fairy-land.”

“I’d ‘a’ gone back with ‘em ef fazer had died,” said Maggie.

“And I’d have stayed with mother,” said Herbert.

“Come, come, children, what is this funny sort of talk?” said the mother as she entered the room. “Now, you’ve been here quite long enough. Run off to your nursery, my darlings. Maurice, it is time for you to take your tonic.”

The children disappeared ; Sherwood took his medicine. As he returned the glass to his wife, he said, “What strange fancies little ones have !”

“Beautiful, aren’t they?” said Ursula.



“Wonderful,” replied the father. “They are so trusting. But what put it into your head, darling, to ask them to ‘make believe’? The thought seemed to gladden all those sorrowful days for the poor mites. I say, Ursula, Herbert has a vivid imagination for such a little fellow. I should not wonder if he wrote good books some day.”

“Of course,” she answered proudly. “He will take after his father.”



## CHAPTER II.

IN a beautiful part of that same Kensington where Maurice Sherwood and Ursula his wife lived, but a good way off from the shabby little street with its shabby pretence gardens, there was a mansion that Ursula used to know a good deal about in her unmarried days. It was an exceedingly quaint old house standing back in grounds of its own, on Camden Hill. These grounds were literally worth their weight in gold, so valuable had the land become. But their owner was counted to be very rich, and he had bought the property cheap, considering what it was worth, and nothing would induce him to part with it. The house was called by the name of "The Briary," for within the memory of the oldest man briar roses had been found there, and even now it was celebrated for rarer flowers of the same



species. The grounds which surrounded the house consisted of nearly two acres, which is a very large amount of land for any one man to possess unoccupied by houses in that part of London. The old mansion which stood in that sweet secluded spot had been added to and added to until the original fabric was almost obliterated by the newer parts of the building. The house was of red brick, and a great part of it was covered with creepers; and whatever money could do had been done to render it beautiful, comfortable, and picturesque. Bay windows had been thrown out here, and pillars erected there, and balconies had been flung from the wide windows on the different floors, so that the whole effect was at once irregular and exceedingly pleasing.

There was a special balcony belonging to that old house on which a girl used to stand in the days when she was tall and slim, rosy of face and clear of eye. This girl had no cares on her young heart then. She lived with rich people, but was not rich herself. She was a near relation of the other charming girl who occupied the house;



she was three years her senior, and several years older with regard to the calibre of her mind. The girl's name in those days had been Ursula Ward. Her cousin and dearest friend was Alice Langton. Oliver Langton, Alice's father, was her uncle and guardian. He was a queer man with many cranks in his disposition. He never greatly cared for Ursula, but he worshipped Alice. Ursula was, however, the more beautiful of the two. She was the sort of girl who charmed and attracted all men whom she came across.

It was her uncle's wish that she should marry well, his idea with regard to that being that she should marry mere money. He had a man in his eye whom he thought would exactly do for his niece. This man was twenty years Ursula's senior. His name was Joseph Parrin. He was dark, with a stern face and a lean body. He had a somewhat crooked smile, and in the girl's eyes a false look about his whole appearance, which she violently disliked. This man coveted her fresh young beauty, and told Langton that he would take her without any fortune and make her a rich woman. Ursula,



terrified, refused. Her uncle swore at her, said that if she kept to this resolution he would never have anything more to do with her, and eventually did send her from his house, to the intense grief of her cousin Alice. Six months later Ursula married Maurice Sherwood, and until the trouble mentioned in the last chapter, had really known poverty without care, had never regretted the step she had taken, but had no intercourse with Alice.

Alice was a totally different girl from her cousin. She was small, rather dark, very active, with a will of her own, and a great power over her father. He loved Alice, but at the same time he was afraid of her. She had her own way in most things; she cultivated a certain form of society, she would ask whom she liked to the old house, but she was not fascinated by what was known as the "fast set." She liked literary people, artists, sculptors, rising poets, anyone, in short, who had a little originality and knew how to use it. It was her taste which caused the Briary to be such an abode of beauty.

She had a companion, whose name was



Miss Durward, a very timid, retiring sort of woman, who had never dared from the first moment she came into the house to dispute Alice's will in any particular. Alice gave all the orders like a young princess, without, alas! the dignity. Not that she lacked a certain sturdy independence which gave her face charm, but she was not beautiful like Ursula, and she knew this fact well.

There was one subject which she had been always afraid of mentioning in her father's presence, and one subject only. Her cousin was taboo, her name must never be introduced into conversation; Ursula's life, as far as Oliver Langton was concerned, had practically ceased to exist. He had been heard to say once, "The hussy has chosen her own path. As she has made her bed, so must she lie on it." There would be even times when he wished her, if not out of the world, at least out of London. Alice, on the contrary, was always endeavouring to find her cousin, but even she did not know that the two pretty children who were seen at intervals in Kensington Gardens belonged to Ursula.

It was just at that very same Christmas



which opened so darkly for Ursula Sherwood that anxiety of the gravest nature also came to Mr. Langton. Had Alice been questioned she could not have told definitely what her father's employment was. She was quite aware that it brought him in many thousands a year, and beyond that fact she took little interest in the matter. Whatever she wanted she could get, clothes, carriages, horses, the finest of fine living, the most luxurious of homes. She could travel where she wished, she could see—with the one exception—whomsoever her heart desired. Money had its uses, but she did not really value it at its true worth, having never known its want. As to her father, the crises through which he passed in the City were unknown to her; she believed that men like her father were born rich and remained so. She liked poor people, and wondered sometimes what it would be to want for a shilling, and if the sensation were pleasant or the reverse. She used to ask her maid to enlighten her, but Stevens was reticent with regard to her own early days, and beyond saying that the poor were not



worth picking up with a pair of tongs, avoided the theme. Alice gave to every charity that was brought under her notice, and gave freely. She was rich, and she supposed, on the whole, it was best.

On a certain day just before Christmas, while Alice Langton was happily preparing innumerable costly and useless presents for her numerous friends and acquaintances, and Alice's cousin, beautiful Ursula Sherwood, was wondering how long there would be bread for the little ones and a shelter to cover them, Oliver Langton was undergoing a fearful money crisis. His firm had dabbled freely in speculation of a doubtful character. Had things gone well the man would have been a multi-millionaire, but things—for the first time in the merchant's career—had not gone well. He needed a large sum to swell his rapidly diminished exchequer—he did not know where to find it. He was in this plight on that morning when he sat down before his office desk and opened his letters. He knew very well the position of affairs in the City. Those gold mines in which he had speculated so freely were showing them-



selves a veritable bubble. It was doubtful if the gold existed at all. If the public found out there would be a panic, and amongst those who went under—never to show his dishonoured head again—Oliver Langton would be found. He thought of Alice—how gay and “never-me-care” her face had appeared that morning, how carelessly she had said good-bye to him, asking him lightly when he would return, but scarcely caring to wait for his answer. He wondered if she really loved him. He thought with the self-pity which comes to a man of his nature, “I have toiled for her, it is on account of her I am so grieved. Had she married that time last year, she would at least have been out of the whirlpool when it sucks me down, but as things are she will go down when I go down.” He thought of this, and then, pulling himself together with a great effort, he resumed the reading of his letters. He stared long at one before he tore the envelope open. There was a foreign stamp on the cover which first attracted his attention. He took an interest in stamps, and had a famous collection, and peering



now at this he saw that it came from Auckland. He looked a little longer at the writing. Something stirred in his heart—a vague, very vague old memory, but he did not for a moment trace the letter to its source. Then he opened it, then he glanced at the signature, then he read the following words :—

“MY DEAR OLIVER,—Of course you can scarcely recall after all this lapse of years that well-known vagabond Jack Halyard, who used to be your friend long ago. I am still alive, but I am about to die. I am anxious that you should be friendly in a certain matter. You always were a lucky dog, and I therefore approach you without any diffidence. I know how honourable and trustworthy you are, and I am certain you will do what I wish.

“Do you remember a certain evening nearly twenty years ago when I visited you at your place, the Briary? You had just purchased it, and had only moved in a few months before. I thought it a perfect paradise of wealth and beauty, but you complained, said the old house was not



worth living in, that you meant to pull some of it down and to add to the rest. I let you talk, not greatly caring what you did with your wealth. I, a man about your own age—we were neither of us thirty then, Oliver—was going to the other end of the world with £5,000 in my pocket, which had been left to me by an aunt. I, too, meant to get a fortune, if such could be made, but my motive for seeking to be rich was very different from yours. Do you remember twitting me on my lonely condition and asking how soon I would send you word of the wife I should be certain to pick up at the Antipodes? I let you mock and made you no answer.

“ You introduced me to the children. I can never forget either of the children. There was your own little daughter, she could not have been more than three or four years old, and there was her cousin, Ursula, little Ursula Ward. I recall as though it was yesterday Ursula's appearance when she came into the room. She was a tall, slim, very fair child; she did not talk much, but she looked at you out of grave



eyes. Her eyes seemed to hold a world of meaning, at least so it seemed to me. Oliver, Ursula was the child of your sister—your only sister, who was dead. She had died when her child was two years old, and her husband, poor Ward, that most erratic and yet delightful human being, broke his heart, just as one might have expected, and followed her a year later to her grave. You used to laugh—for you had quite a pleasant way of smiling at life in those days—at Amy's devotion to Ward and at Ward's passionate love for her, but you never guessed, old chap, that two men loved her, each of them I think with an equal devotion. One was that poor chap who broke his heart and died because she was no longer near him, and the other was your humble servant, Jack Halyard. It was for the sake of Amy that I never married, and now I will tell you something else. It was for the sake of Amy's child that I went to the other side of the world and fought hard with every evil demon that can possess a man, and every misfortune that can undermine him, and every known disease that can buffet



him. And in the end I conquered, for I made a goodly pile of money. I made it for little Ursula. I will tell you why, Oliver. I read your character right that evening. Doubtless love for the dead woman opened my eyes, and I knew that you were not the sort of man to care greatly for any child. You would be good to Ursula—not too good. Alice was safe, because she was your own child, and then Alice would never suffer as Ursula could suffer—Ursula, who had her father's eyes and her mother's nature. So I resolved to act as good Providence to little Ursula Ward. Long ago I should have communicated with you about her, but many misfortunes kept me silent. Now I am dying—by the time this reaches you I shall no longer be in the world. But I put a trust absolutely into your hands.

“When I die my lawyers will tell you that you are sole heir to what would seem to you a contemptible fortune, namely £60,000, but that money is not for you, it is for the child Ursula. She may be married now and she may be rich. In any case, whether married or unmarried, whether rich



or poor, you are to hand her over the money—the capital, mind you—to do what she wills with. It is for her and hers. If she is above ground she is to have it, but if God has taken the child from the evils of this evil world, then you can keep the money for yourself. It is easiest for me to arrange the matter thus, to trust one whose honour is unimpeachable, absolutely.

“You may hear from my lawyers by the same post which brings you this letter, certainly you will hear by the following mail. My days are numbered. Ask little Ursula sometimes to think of me. Tell her, when you tell her the rest, that I may now have met her father and mother.

“Yours, old chap, faithfully,  
‘JACK HALYARD.’”

When Langton had finished reading this letter there came a knock at the door. He raised a flushed face, his eyes were gleaming strangely. One of his clerks appeared with a message.

“Philips,” he said, “I do not wish to be disturbed for an hour; whoever comes, be



it the king himself, I am not to be disturbed for an hour. Go—see that my orders are attended to.”

The man withdrew silently ; he knew his employer's moods too well to question his wishes for a moment. When he was quite alone Langton rose. He walked up and down for several minutes. Then he muttered in a low growl—“ Curse the man.” A minute or two later he said to himself, “ Has the devil come to tempt me ? ”—then he shut the letter under the lid of his desk and rummaged with trembling fingers through the rest of his correspondence.

Yes, there was another communication from Auckland. Jack Halyard was dead ; the letter which he himself had written, had directed, and had even stamped, was put into the post at the same moment that the dead man's will, with a long letter from the lawyers, was sent to London addressed to Oliver Langton. He read the words of the will carefully, his eyes were gleaming and his mouth tremulous. Then that mouth grew hard and cruel ; his nose, somewhat hooked, became more hawk-like than



usual ; his eyes seemed to narrow and recede into his head.

“ Absolutely mine,” he muttered ; and then he said in a low tone under his breath, “ All that money left to me, not one allusion in the will to the private letter, which tells me how to use it. I shall burn the letter. I am saved. This will put me straight. Bankruptcy is avoided. I will make it good to Ursula some day—curse her ! But perhaps she is dead. I hope she is dead. I am saved—truly as by a miracle ! ”



### CHAPTER III.

LANGTON did not return home that night. He sent a telegram to Alice telling her not to expect him. He alleged pressing business as the cause of his absence. Alice received the letter half an hour before dinner. She was not in the least discomposed. It took a great deal to cause a frown to come to her face, or any sense of annoyance to her mind. She simply told the servants that Mr. Langton was not to be waited for and that dinner was to be served when it was ready.

A few minutes later a young man, who was announced as Mr. Deane, entered the room. Alice rose from a low seat by the fire where she had placed herself.

"I hope, Stephen," she said, "you will not mind a *tête-à-tête* dinner with me.



Business—that detestable word—has kept the padre in town. I do not expect he will come back to-night, but I will do my best to entertain you, if you are inclined to put up with me. Or would you prefer to run away?”

“Nonsense, Alice!” replied Stephen. “If you can bear with me, I shall be more than happy. Then,” he added, “the fact is, I consider this a godsend, for perhaps you will help me.”

“You know I shall be delighted to do that, Stephen. Have you another craze on—another big charity which needs a large donation?”

“Not a charity in the ordinary sense,” he responded. “Nevertheless, perhaps your purse and your willing, generous heart may assist. I will tell you the story after dinner—it is a little bit out of the common, that I can assure you.”

She smiled, and looked up at him approvingly. He was a tall, well set up young fellow of six or seven and twenty. His face was fair and delicately moulded. He was altogether a contrast to Alice, who was dark, vivacious, and very thin.

Deane had once said to her : " You do so much, you will wear yourself out."

But, as he uttered the words, he wondered if they were true. Alice was possessed of an intensely active spirit, without being over-weighted with strong sensibilities. She had long ago made up her mind not to fret over what she was pleased to call " the inevitable." Her father's absences from home never afflicted her. The morose look which often came to his brow caused her little distress. She lived with him, and accepted the benefits he showered upon her without any special gratitude to him for bestowing them.

" I am just as glad as possible that we shall be alone to-night," she said now to Stephen Deane. " It is quite nice to talk over our pet schemes, and, although the dear padre has a habit of going to sleep in his armchair, so that we are often virtually alone, to be alone in earnest once in a blue moon will be pleasant. You see, you are my almoner, Stephen. But for you, I should get into hopeless scrapes in the dispensing of my charity."



As she spoke she looked at him with a momentary wistfulness in her somewhat small dark eyes. If there was anyone in the world who could appeal to the heart of Alice Langton, Stephen Deane was that person. When his name was announced, it did beat a trifle quicker than its wont. When he spoke to her, she invariably listened. In a crowd, she was always able to single him out. No matter what other man approached her and paid court to her, she was cold as ice to all but him. She never for a moment acknowledged, even to herself, that she loved him. She had long ago made up her mind not to marry anyone. But when she pictured herself in her declining years, rich beyond the dreams of avarice, she also felt sure that Stephen would not be far off. He would still advise, still help, still be her best counsellor and friend.

On the present occasion they both sat down to a cosy *tête-à-tête* dinner. The wheels of the household were always kept well oiled, and all went smoothly. The young man and the girl talked of many

subjects in which they were mutually interested. By and by they both returned to the drawing-room. Alice saw that her guest had a comfortable chair, and then she began to speak.

“ You have something to tell me: what is it ? ”

She looked him full in the eyes. Although she had no suspicion that she cared for him, yet it would give her intense pain were he to marry anyone but herself. She owned to a sense of comfort in his presence. There was that unmistakable light in her eyes now which the least vain man cannot fail to recognise.

Deane observed it just for a minute. He had no more intention of asking Alice Langton to be his wife than he had of marrying anyone just at present. But that look drew him on to sit a little nearer to her and to feel more pleased than he had even been before dinner, when he found that they could have this unexpected evening to themselves.

“ You must be so busy now,” he said. “ It seems cruel to speak of future calls or claims on you just at Christmas.”



“I am not at all specially busy,” she answered, with a slight toss of her head. “My companion, Constance Druward, takes the worry of everything off my shoulders. By the way, you must wonder where she is this evening. She has gone to see an old uncle, who claims her tender care each Christmas as it passes, for one week. For a whole week, therefore, I shall be unchaperoned. But before my dear, good Constance left me, she packed the last parcel, addressed the last hamper of fruit and vegetables; and not only did these multifarious and tiresome duties, but saw the parcels into the post. Her final task was to write a few letters, some only containing the usual cards of greeting, others a few postal orders—just a few. It is so nice, Stephen, to spend our superfluity at this time of year in helping others.”

“I know you feel it, Alice. Other women, as rich as you, would not act as you are doing. And now for my story. Owing to you and your delightful, generous way of doing things, I feel myself sometimes in the position of a fairy godfather. Shall I tell

you what has especially occurred to me to-day ? ”

“ Yes, do. We will be fairy godfather and fairy godmother together this Christmas. What fun it will be ! ”

The girl bent a little closer to the young man. Stephen drew his chair imperceptibly nearer to hers. She was nice—she was nice, independent of her wealth, and with that light in her eyes—that light which meant——? He paused even in the thought that came to him. A sudden blush suffused his fair cheek. He lowered his eyes.

“ Well, Stephen ? ” said Alice.

He raised them now and fixed them on her face.

“ I was in Kensington Gardens this afternoon ; the idea came to me there.”

“ What could it have been ? ” said Alice, smiling, and lying back in her chair in order to enjoy herself all the more.

“ A pair of children came into the Gardens, accompanied by the very smallest nurse I have ever seen. She could not have been more than twelve or thirteen years of age, and minute for that. There was no attempt



at her being grown up. She wore a short dress, patched boots, and hair done in what I believe the ladies call a pigtail. She had a slight cast in one eye, and the said hair was carroty."

"Not an interesting description," said Alice. "But I suppose the children atoned for the nurse."

"You are right; the children did more than atone. There were two—a boy with great dark eyes, sweet lips, a resolute little chin, a defiant sort of manner; and a girl, who was all round dimples. She was younger than the boy by a year or two. Her hair was a mop of curls, I don't know the colour. Her eyes were blue, like a bit of the sky. They nestled—these two infants—close together, and the small maid sat and watched them. Her sole object in life seemed to be to reprove them; her speech was such a mass of corrections that I wondered the quaint little couple did not turn and rend her. She was always talking in this fashion:

" 'Don't be silly, Master Herbert. Miss Mags, you'll dirty your frock, and then

what'll poor mother say? Master Herbert, you'll make your poor sick father cry!'

"This went on for a time, but at last the boy rose to the occasion.

" 'Jane,' he said, 'if you don't stop talking, I'll get the tallest brownie to come and fetch you to-night.'

"You should have heard the tone in which he spoke, and the effect it had on Jane. Her lip dropped, her eye squinted horribly as she said in a pathetic voice:

" 'Oh, don't 'ee, now, Master Herbert!'

"The valiant Herbert turned to the girl of dimples, who was addressed as 'Magsie.'

" 'See how she believes in him,' he said. 'Now you stay quiet, Jane, and let *me* talk.'

"Then he did begin to talk, and the dimpled girl listened. They no more minded me than if I were not there. He began to tell her what would happen on the night before Christmas.

" 'I feel it in my bones,' he said.

" 'Does 'oo?' said the dimpled one.

" 'Yes,' he answered, 'I feel it all down my bones.'



“ ‘What you feel in your bones comes true,’ interrupted Jane, the maid, with great fervour.

“ The others took no notice.

“ ‘Tell us, Herbert,’ said the little girl.

“ Then he related the most wonderful, rambling story about the things that would come from the fairies at Christmas. In the midst of his catalogue, the dimpled one exclaimed :

“ ‘There must be monish for muzzer !’

“ After this, Alice, I deliberately took out my note-book. I wrote down the list of what the fairies were to send. I have it here. The children talked for a long time. When they had quite finished all arrangements, they got up. The boy straightened the skirts of the dimpled girl and pulled her bonnet right. They announced to Jane, with the manner of a prince and princess, that she was to take them home, and I followed the queer trio out of the Gardens and all the way back, without any one of that funny group noticing me any more than if I were a spirit of the air. I went up to the very door of the house

where they lived, and they saw me not. In one sense, nothing could have been more humiliating; in another, nothing better could have occurred.

“The house was a very ugly and poor one. The street was called by the name of Asprey Gardens; it is not more than a mile away from here. It is a detestable spot, with no more of a garden about it than there is in Seven Dials.

“The house into which the prince and princess retired looks on a blank wall, but nothing could exceed the majesty of their steps and the light in their eyes. These things are easily accounted for; they believe in fairies.”

“You did not find out their name?” said Alice, when Deane stopped speaking.

“No; but I have the address of the house.”

“Is that all the story?”

“So far it is all—of course, it is not the end.”

“What do you mean?”

“I have a list of the things they want.”

He tapped his note-book.



“ Well ? ”

“ I thought, Alice, you would send them to the children. It would be such a pity to destroy their faith in the fairies.”

“ That is true,” said Alice, a little restlessly. “ And yet, of course, there are no fairies, Stephen.”

He smiled.

“ Yes, there are,” he said. “ The children are right. And when you send them these varied items—and I warn you they are not at all small items—you will be their good fairy. I wish I could send the things myself, but the blessed privilege must be yours.”

“ Let me see the list,” she said.

She bent over it, conning it eagerly, while a merry smile broke round her lips.

“ ‘ Noah’s ark,’ ” she read aloud. “ ‘ It must be large. Doll for Mags—it must be a big doll and its clothes must come off and on. Sponge cakes—a big bagful—but these are not *kite* necessary.’ ”

“ I took down their language literally,” interrupted Stephen.

Alice continued to read :

“ ‘New mantle for muzzer—must be soft—and *vedy* warm. New shoes for me (Mags)—must not hurt *me* toes—Big coat—lined with pussy cats for fazer—’cause he’s been so *vedy* ill. Lots of books for father, ’cause he loves reading.’ This thought was evidently Herbert’s. ‘Big lots of money for muzzer, ’cause she *kies* when the naughty, naughty bills come in. Big lot of money for fazer, so he can go to the lone, lone sea and get *kite* well again. Raisins, apples, nuts—any sort of cakes, piled up anyhow—and plum-puddings and turkeys and geoses.’ These were evidently the practical Herbert’s desire.”

“I think that is all,” said Stephen; “a goodly and comprehensive list.”

“Comprehensive, truly,” said Alice.

“You will act the fairy godmother, won’t you?” said Stephen, in a somewhat anxious tone.

“Of course. How can you doubt me for a moment? And the matter will be easy. Let me see the list again.”

He handed her his note-book.

“ ‘Noah’s ark,’ ” she read; “ ‘large



Noah's ark.' That can be managed. 'A big doll.' Certainly. 'Sponge cakes.' Why yes, my little child, they are quite easy. 'New mantle for the mother.' A little more difficult, seeing I have not the slightest idea either of her size or age."

"Oh, she must be young and quite beautiful," said Stephen.

"Why beautiful?" asked Alice.

"Because only a beautiful woman could have those children."

"Then I will buy a mantle for a beautiful young woman. 'New shoes for the baby.' 'A big coat, lined with pussy-cats,' for the sick father. You had better choose that for me, Stephen. 'Books'—oh, of course books can be managed. Also the apples, raisins, nuts, cakes, plum puddings, turkeys, and even—to quote from the dimpled Mags—'gooses.' But what about the money? How ought I to send the money?"

"You must send it in gold," said Stephen, a note of anxiety coming again into his voice. A cheque would be impossible, and postal orders would spoil the illusion. It must be gold—fairy gold—don't forget that."

"But how much—how much?" asked the girl. "Money for all the naughty bills." How much do the bills come to?—and "enough over to send father to the lone, lone sea." I am puzzled."

"I tell you what I'll do," said Stephen after a pause, "I will go and see Mrs. Murray."

"I never heard of her," said Alice.

"She's the wife of the curate of Magdelein Church. She is poor enough, bless you, and as practical as the day. I will ask her what might be enough and yet not too much. It would never do to send too much. That would also spoil the illusion."

"Very well," said Alice. "My wish would be to go to the bank to-morrow, get two or three bags full of sovereigns and pop them promiscuously amongst the other parcels, then take all the things in a cab and leave them at the door. I'd like to be in the cab."

"We can manage the cab if we go quite late in the evening," said Stephen. "We'll drive up when it's dark. It is dark so early at this time of year—and we'll both get out



and load ourselves with parcels and take them up the steps and ring the bell. Then when the servant opens the door we'll push them higgledy-piggledy into the hall, and say that the White Fairy sent them, and go off again before the family have time to recover from their astonishment."

"The children will understand," said Alice, her eyes sparkling.

"Certainly they will," replied Stephen. "They won't have a shadow of doubt upon the subject."

"They must be dear children," said Alice; "particularly the boy."

"The girl appealed to me most," said Stephen.

Alice was silent after that, she kept looking into the fire. Her face wore a wistful expression.

"It is strange," she said after a pause, "that people should exist and want these sort of everyday things."

"There are thousands and tens of thousands of such people in the world," said Stephen.

"I know it. I suppose I ought to be sad, but somehow I don't realise it."

"It is impossible for you to do so—you who have always had so much."

"Stephen, as I sit here I am oppressed by a memory. There is one whom I should like to have seated by me to-night by the household hearth."

"Who is that?" asked the young man.

"My cousin. Have I never told you about her?"

"Never. I fancied somehow that you were without relations."

"She left us," said Alice, "when I was a child, or rather a girl beginning to grow up. I was between fifteen and sixteen years of age. She was just twenty."

"Why did she go?"

"She offended my father. Her sin was this—she cared more for love than for gold."

"She must have been a fine girl," said Stephen, his eyes dilating with keen appreciation.

"Fine!" exclaimed Alice; "there never was anyone like her. I recall her now. To begin with, she was beautiful, not so much with beauty of feature as beauty of



expression. I cannot really tell you whether she was dark or fair, or what her features were like. I only know that she was lovely. She was tall, too, and slender. I wasn't a patch on her. She loved me and was very sweet to me, and we were happy together as the day is long. Then something happened which caused father to turn against her. Father is terrible when he dislikes anyone. She cried one day—I saw that her eyes were red. When I was in bed she came into my room. I did not dare to ask her what was the matter, for, gentle as she was, she was the sort of girl whom you did not dare to take liberties with. She bent and kissed me, and then she said, 'Alice, I have been unlucky enough to offend your father.'

" 'What have you done?' I asked.

" 'I cannot marry the man he wants me to marry.'

" I was so young that I could not in the least comprehend what this meant.

" 'Won't you marry to please him?' I said. 'He is so very cross when he is angry.'

“ ‘I won’t marry anyone I don’t love,’ she replied, and then she said, ‘Don’t forget me, Alice ; please don’t forget me.’

“ In the morning father himself told me that she had left the house. He said that he had arranged with a person—he would not mention the person’s name—to give Ursula a home. He said that he would pay for the home for six months, but not a day longer. He said further that Ursula was ungrateful, was disobedient, was obstinate, was a fool. He said that he only kept her in his house out of kindness, that she had no special claim upon him, and that now he meant to wash his hands of her. He would pay for her living for six months, after that she must fend for herself. I cried most bitterly when he told me these things. He was very angry with me for crying, and said further that I was never to speak of Ursula to him, and I was never to see her any more. I thought surely this must be impossible, but I could not gauge the strength of my father’s will. Whether it was his doing or hers, I never did see her after that night, but



six months later we got the news that she had married a poor man, a certain Maurice Sherwood."

"What?" interrupted Stephen.

"Maurice Sherwood, a sort of editor or journalist—a man who was quite, quite poor."

"But I am sure I know the man," said Stephen. "I have read his articles. He writes in the very best magazines. There was a paper signed 'M. S.' in the last *National Review*. It was on the state of finance in Russia, a very thoughtful paper indeed."

"Perhaps he is the same," said Alice, her tone not specially interested; "anyhow, I never saw my cousin again. I don't know where she is—she may be dead for all I can tell you to the contrary."

"And you think of her with sorrow to-night?"

"Yes, I think of her with much sorrow. Each Christmas as it comes my heart aches about her. I would give anything to see her and find out how the world fares with her."

"You have a very kind heart yourself, Alice."

"No, Stephen, that is just it; I have not a specially kind heart. Perhaps the world has hardened it, or perhaps I take after my father. I give to the poor and all those in trouble because it is a delight to me, but I have not a warm heart."

"Yet for your cousin Ursula——"

"Oh, Ursula is different," said Alice. "Her character is very much finer than mine; I always looked up to her. Doubtless her husband is a great man if he writes in the big reviews. Doubtless they are very well off."

Stephen did not say anything. After a short time he rose to go. Alice reminded him of their plan for the morrow. He would see Mrs. Murray at an early hour and come and inform Alice with regard to the exact sum of money which was to be conveyed as the fairies' gold to the children, whose names neither of them knew. All arrangements were made, and he took his departure. Alice sat for a long time over the fire when he had gone. She thought



of the past, the happy past, when she and Ursula had laughed and played and learnt together, the less happy past when Ursula had left her. She did not know why she was restless, dissatisfied, depressed to-night.

## CHAPTER IV.

ON the day before Christmas Day the children at No. 11, Asprey Gardens, were quite happy. If Ursula was full of care, neither Herbert nor Magsie shared in it. The house to them was full of Christmas. It did not matter a bit to them whether Christmas Day was ushered into a poor dwelling or a rich one. They knew nothing of these fine and really unimportant distinctions. It was Christmas Day, the day when the Child Christ came into the world to make all the other children happy. Christmas Eve was a magnificent day, it was so bustling, so fussy. Magsie loved the house when it was fussy, she liked to trot upstairs and downstairs, to poke her dimpled face round the door or stretch out her fat hand to feel "such a pie," or to



glance with her round eyes at "such a pudding!"

Ursula was determined, come what would, to buy half a crown's worth of penny toys. She could not possibly rise to the five shillings which her husband suggested, but half a crown's worth divided amongst two little people, for baby was still too young to have opened the doors of Toyland, would go a long way. She spent nearly an hour at the shop round the corner selecting them, and then she bought some coarse, white muslin and half a pound of mixed sweet-meats, intending that night to make little bags into which the bon-bons could be dropped; the children would enjoy their Christmas as much as their richer neighbours.

Magsie, having constantly questioned Herbert as to the exact time when the fairies would send the Christmas things, viewed the smaller preparations of the day with immense calm. She knew quite well that mother had gone to buy toys.

"Poor muzzer," she said to Herbert, "her finks that we want them stupid toys,

she don't know what the fawries will bring."

Herbert listened very gravely when Magsie spoke. He was seven years old, in the summer he would be eight; Magsie was between four and five. Into her mind had never entered even a shadow of doubt with regard to the existence of the beautiful white fairies; but Herbert had, alas! tasted of the tree of knowledge. Not long ago he had spent a very solemn time all alone by himself, during which he had most seriously invoked the aid of the tallest of the white fairies. He had been in great trouble at the time. He had broken a little white vase which mother had given him to fill with water in order to put some violets into it, these violets being meant for father's room. Alas! Herbert in his bustle had broken the pretty vase. Here was an opportunity for the fairies to show their goodwill! He crept into the little back room where his father often wrote, and put the whole case quite plainly before them. It was most important that his sick father should not be annoyed by knowing what



he had done. The violets would give him pleasure. If the white fairy would put another vase in the place of the broken one, Herbert would be quite content. It was a small matter to ask of one so rich and so powerful. He put the case very straight before the fairy, begging of her not to delay in the matter, as the violets would wither if they were not soon put into water. He then went out of the room. His faith was quite strong. He resolved to tell his mother nothing whatever with regard to the accident which had just occurred. He was busy for an hour in different ways; he thought it a fair thing to give the white fairy at least that much time, for the place where she kept the white vases might be a very long way off—worlds and worlds away.

Mrs. Sherwood came to him. "I have got father's tea nicely ready, Herbert, but I want to put the violets on the tray. Will you go and fetch them, darling, and see that the little vase has enough water in it?"

Herbert flew off with trembling expectancy. The vase would be there, of course, new come from Fairyland, beautiful,

with a magic about it which alone would help his father to get well. The broken vase would have vanished from sight. He burst into the dingy room. "Have you done it, kind fairy?" he said, in his confident tone. There was no answer. The room was dark, but there was a tiny point of gas in the gasolier over his head. He clambered on to the table and turned on a great flare of light.

Alas for Herbert! The pieces of the broken vase lay on the floor and no kind white fairy had come to replace them with a whole one. He was obliged to confess to his mother, and he cried a great deal over the confession, leaving out, however, all that part about the fairy. He felt for the time almost ashamed of his belief in fairies.

On Christmas Eve, therefore, although a great deal of that belief had come back to him, he was not quite as absolutely certain as was Magsie.

The day wore on, the night approached. Mags, in her nursery, came up and whispered to Herbert, "They aren't come yet,



and they ought to be a-coming." Herbert said, "Hush!" Mags also stopped perfectly still, as though something or someone had turned her into stone. A cab was heard rattling down the Gardens. It stopped abruptly outside No 11. There were two or three minutes of delicious, palpitating silence. The children held each other's hands. Then came a resounding and most inspiring ring at the front door.

Herbert poked his head over the banisters; Mags nestled close to him. Neither child could speak. The servant was very slow in going to the door, but she did go at last. Some things quite big and ponderous came rustling into the hall, they came banging and pushing their way into the narrow hall. A voice said, as though a long way off, "For the children at No. 11, Asprey Gardens," and then another voice said, still further away, "From the white fairy," and the door banged to and the cab rolled away, and there were only the usual sounds in the street.

Mags rolled downstairs as though she

were a ball; Herbert sprang clean over her in order to get first to the door. His faith in the fairies was re-established, he was quite white with agitation. As to Mags, having never doubted, she took the realisation of her hopes with greater calmness.

“They has come,” she said. “Muzzer’s, fazer’s, all the tings has come; geeses, plum puddings, *all* the tings!” Then she tugged fiercely at her brother’s arm—“Has the monish come?” she asked, in a little voice that was almost strained.



M LIBRARY	
Acc.	1704.
U.D.C.	9.31 / MEH
Date;	5-7-21.

## CHAPTER V.

To believe in fairies you must really have at once a grown-up mind and a child's heart —by no means a childish heart, but the beautiful heart of the everlasting child—the child who will never grow up, who will keep the blessed gifts of imagination always in his breast.

Now it so happened that both Ursula and her husband possessed these immaculate hearts, and, therefore, when the fairy gifts arrived and were opened in the presence of the ecstatic children ; when father put on the overcoat with the pussy-cat lining ; when mother enveloped herself in the delicious mantle, soft, lovely, of the richest velvet ; when the children themselves surveyed everything they had asked for, down to the “gooses,” which had to

appear in the plural in order to carry out such explicit directions ; both Mr. and Mrs. Sherwood never damped their children's ardour by one doubting word. They accepted the gifts as they were meant to accept them.

"It will be a great help—an immense help," said Ursula. "How very kind of the white fairy !"

"Yes ; isn't it—isn't it booful !" said Mags. "And has 'oo monish 'nough, muzzer, for all the howwid bills ?"

The money was a very remarkable part of the gift. It had come in such an odd way—it was found rolling out of the pockets in the pussy-cat coat, and tumbling from the cuffs which gave such a handsome effect to the jacket-mantle. It was also discovered in quite amazing quantities in Noah's Ark ; and as to the doll, whose clothes could come off and on, she really was extravagant and imprudent in the way she kept loose sovereigns in her trunk of dainty under-clothes.

Now these sovereigns proved to be the most exciting part of the fairies' gifts. They



numbered, when counted up, quite fifty pounds—it was wonderful! Ursula's cheeks grew pinker and pinker as she gazed; while, as to Maurice Sherwood, he declared that the fairies were making a man of him on the spot.

“We will ask the little Hodgsons and the little Merrimans in to Christmas dinner,” said Ursula; “it would be a perfect sin to eat up all the fairies' puddings and geese and turkeys by ourselves.”

“All by our lone selves!” said Mags. “But then,” she added earnestly, “I knowed white fawry would send 'nough for other little sildrens.”

Ursula laughed, caught the sweet little bundle in her arms and covered the dimpled face with kisses.

Yes, that Christmas Eve was one to be long remembered. All their lives Herbert and Mags would think about that wonderful night when the white fairy came in person and filled the hall with the magic of love and plenty, of goodwill and blessing. Yes, and gold, too—for such gold, being the result of love, was certain to work most admirable results!

That same night, as Ursula stood warming herself by the fire in her husband's room, she said—

“The whole thing is most wonderful!”

“We will keep it as a wonderful thing always, Ursula, won't we?” he answered.

“Yes—yes; and the children believe in it so thoroughly,” she continued.

“They must always believe in it,” he said.

“But there is just one thing, Maurice.”

“What, my darling?”

“I should like to thank that white fairy.”

“I am afraid that is impossible.”

“No, not quite—I have thought of a way. The children shall put a little message of thanks into the Agony Column of the *Times*.”

“Oh,” said Sherwood, “that will make it so material.”

“No, it won't. We'll word it quite beautifully. The children shall say that they return their most grateful thanks to the white fairy who gave them so many lovely things on Christmas Eve.”



Sherwood laughed.

“As you please,” he said. “But whatever we do, don’t let us become materialistic over this bounteous gift.”

“No,” she answered.

Nevertheless, she had her way, and, accordingly, two days later, there appeared in the *Times* the following words—

*“Margaret and Herbert Sherwood, of Asprey Gardens, return best of best thanks to the white fairy.”*

“I hope no one will think our children have taken leave of their senses,” said Sherwood. But his eyes glistened as he read the words.

Christmas Day, with all its love and blessing and goodwill, had gone by, and Ursula felt that the moment had come when she must tell her husband the truth. For forty-eight hours she had given herself up absolutely to the joy which the fairies had brought. She was a child with the other children. She revelled in the good fare, the warm garments and also in that

delicious fairy gold. The children spent a long time poking through every recess of those brown paper parcels, hunting for sovereigns. But they never found more than fifty, and at last they discovered that that was the limit of the white fairy's gift.

Ursula let both Christmas Day and Boxing Day go by. On the next day, matters had surely come down to the normal. The fifty sovereigns were put carefully away. They were for the children. Ursula would not spend a penny of that precious money on herself.

Upon this she was resolved—the bills must be met from some other source. She was pondering on these things, sitting heavy eyed once more by her little writing table, a pile of unpaid bills before her, when Mags came in swiftly.

“My darling—aren't you going out with Jane?”

“Es,” said Mags, “pwesently. What is 'oo fwowning for, muzzer?”

The little hands stole up and tried to rub the wrinkles from Ursula's brow. She smiled at once, and caught the child to her breast.



"Hasn't the fawies sent 'nough monish to mummie?" asked Mags.

"A beautiful lot!" said Ursula.

"Will it pay bills?" asked Mags.

"No, no — darling — that special lovely money, all golden and full of the deepest love—not like ordinary gold—is meant for Herbert and you."

"No, muzzer. I'm sort o' 'shamed o' you, muzzer," said Mags, springing from her mother's knee.

She marched out of the room and returned in a minute with Herbert.

"Herbert," she said, "what did we ask white fawry 'bout monish?"

"Oh! to pay bills, of course," said Herbert.

"Now, you see, muzzer!" said Mags, "it was meant for howwid bills, and to keep 'oo fom fwowning. Come, Herbert, I'm going out."

After that explanation, Ursula did feel that she ought to spend the money in the way the fairies wished. She tried to take an everyday view of the matter, and forced herself not to think at all of how it had

come to her. But even an added fifty pounds would not go far, when debts were many, the rent to be met, and the little household to be fed and carried on its way. The fifty pounds which had been sent by the editor of the *Weekly Journal* was, it is true, still intact. But even so, the future was full of grave anxieties.

Ursula was bending over her desk, when she heard a feeble step in the tiny hall, and Sherwood, with his tired face, his expressive and wonderfully pathetic eyes, came in. He smiled when he saw his wife. That smile of his was always a revelation—so marvellous was its sweetness.

“My darling,” he said, “you’re not going to work at the household books just now.”

She started to her feet.

“You know, Maurice, you ought to stay in your room—you rest better there.”

“My room is too small for me, little wife. I am like the bird, tired of the nest, I want to fly aloft.”

“Oh, darling! there is very little of the power of flying in you yet. But listen—do



listen. What do you think those angelic children have said ? ”

She repeated Mags’ words with regard to the gold.

“ Of course we will take it,” said Sherwood. “ It will help wonderfully.”

“ I was thinking,” she said, “ that we might go just for a week to Brighton. It would be fine and sunny there now, and would pull you together more than anything else.”

“ All right,” he answered ; “ and we’ll take the children.”

“ Yes ; we’ll take the children,” she replied, with a very faint sigh.

Sherwood lay back in the slippery arm-chair with its broken spring.

“ It would be money well spent,” he said. “ I’ll come back like a lion refreshed. We might go to-morrow or next day—I could then be back in the office early in the New Year.”

“ Oh, Maurice ! ” said his wife.

“ You mustn’t prevent me, dearest. I’ll drop a line to Brompton and tell him to expect me not later than the third or fourth.”

“ Maurice ! ”

“ What is it, darling ? ”

“ I kept it from you—I can keep it no longer.”

There was something in the quality of her voice which caused him to look at her attentively.

“ What did you keep from me, Ursula ? ” he asked.

His tone was quite grave, and very calm.

“ They have given you up—they have cast you from them ; they were cruel—they would not wait.”

“ You mean that I have lost my berth ? ”

“ That is it.”

“ When ? ”

“ Oh, six weeks ago now. There was a letter.”

“ From Brompton, Ursula ? ”

“ Yes ; addressed to me—quite kind. He enclosed you a cheque for fifty pounds. He said he was very sorry, but he must get someone and could not turn him out when you got well. He said, though, he'd do his best to get you into another berth.”

“ Yes—oh, yes,” said Sherwood.



He was quite silent after saying these words. His face looked a little more tired and his eyes more pathetic. But in a minute he said, cheerily—

“It is all for the best, of course ; and one could expect nothing different. I am glad I didn’t write to thank him, though. I was awfully struck with his forbearance, and I meant to tell him so ; but you would not have let me post the letter—no.”

Ursula was struggling with her tears. He saw her emotion, and held out his hand.

“Think of the children’s gold, and take heart,” he said.

She went up to him ; he put his arms round her. For a time he was silent ; after a little he said he would like to return to his room. She took him back there, noticing how very faint and weak he was. She brought him some nourishment, and he revived.

“You are the best of women,” he said emphatically. But after a pause he added, “You ought not to have kept it from me, all the same.”

“I could not help myself, Maurice,” she

replied. "How could I tell you when you were weak and very ill?"

"All right, dearest; but I know now—I am glad I know."

He held out his thin, almost shadowy, hands to the blaze.

"We will pull along," he said; "and the children's fifty pounds will be a grand help."

"Oh, grand," she answered, trying to fall into his mood.

"But perhaps," he continued, "we had better not go to Brighton."

"Perhaps not," she replied, in a very low tone.

"It might be a risk, too, Ursula," he continued. "It is often a mistake to change the comforts of one's own home in the winter. Doubtless it is wisest not to go—and the house is full of such excellent fare. To say nothing of the turkeys, there are still some 'geeses' left, are not there?"

"Oh, we're all geeses, I think," she said. The tears now rose irrepressibly to her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

"We are nothing of the sort, my own



little woman," was his answer. "Far from admitting anything so cowardly, I maintain that we are such wise folks that even the white fairy takes notice of us. Perhaps, Ursula, perhaps we belong to those exceedingly simple and yet wise folks who are spoken of as babes by the Lord Christ. To such His Spirit is revealed."

"You make me ashamed of myself," was her answer.

He drew his chair a little closer to the fire.

"After all," he said, "it isn't so bad to have to give up the drudgery of that sub-editorship. It always was a grind; and then it wore me out for the higher class of work. Now I can devote all my time to cultivating the best that is in me. Why, little woman, my brain just teems with ideas—I will soon put things right for you and the bairns. We won't go to Brighton; and I will take a holiday to-day and to-morrow. The day after I will begin my *Magnum Opus*. You know how we have talked it over together."

The children returned in high spirits. No

one had ever been so delightful as father was during the rest of that day. Altogether, life was a very pleasant thing, even though Brompton would not keep Sherwood's place open for him. There are certain things in the world which are more valuable than mere money—of such all the joys of a simple household and the courage which fills noble hearts. These gifts, joined to good and perfect love, can well afford to laugh at mere money.



## CHAPTER VI.

CHRISTMAS DAY was, after all, not nearly such a delightful one at the Briary. Mr. Langton had returned and was apparently in good spirits, and there was a great dinner party that night, where Stephen Deane, amongst others, was present.

In the course of the evening, Alice said to him—

“I wonder how those little children enjoyed the white fairy’s gifts.”

He smiled back at her, and then she added—

“I do wish I knew the names of the children, don’t you, Stephen?”

“No, I don’t,” was his reply. “I would rather just leave them in that sort of dream world where such little creatures ought always to live.”

“But if there were only dream white fairies,” she replied, “the poor little children would not secure much material good.”

Somebody came up, Alice had to turn her attention to other matters, and nothing more was said. But two days afterwards, when Langton had returned to town and Alice was alone in her own private sitting-room, Deane burst in, his face aglow, his eyes shining.

“You have your wish, Miss Langton. I have discovered the names of the children.”

“What?” she answered, full of the deepest interest. “What do you mean?”

“Just what I say—I have discovered their names; look for yourself. The sweet mites, or perhaps their parents—the ‘muzzer’ who wanted the ‘monish,’ or perhaps the father, who required the coat with the pussy-cat lining, thought of a plan of sending us a message. Here it is. Who would have thought of the Agony Column in the *Times*? Look for yourself; here it is—names and all.”

Alice went up close to Stephen and, looking over his shoulder, read as follows—



*"Margaret and Herbert Sherwood, of Asprey Gardens, return best of best thanks to the white fairy."*

Having read the words, Alice started back, her eyes opened to their widest.

"Sherwood? Sherwood?" she cried. "Why, Ursula married a Mr. Sherwood—why, it can't—it can't be the same."

"Not likely," said Stephen, wondering at her agitation.

"Dear Ursula!" continued Alice, "what would not I give to see her again! Stephen, I can't stand this, I shall go this very minute to 11, Asprey Gardens, and ask boldly to see Mrs. Sherwood. If she is Ursula, I shall be the happiest girl in the world. If she is not, I can but apologise. Oh, Stephen, this is exciting! Don't keep me, but come with me, if you like!"

"I should like it beyond anything," said Deane. "I have nothing special to do to-day. And really, whether the lady is your cousin or not, it would be nice to look again at the dimpled Mags and the heroic young Herbert. Even Jane, of the squint, would

possess a sort of relative interest, under the circumstances."

"We will go at once—what fun, what fun!" cried Alice.

She ran up to her room; her heart felt light as air. As she was putting on her outdoor things she suddenly realised how much she missed Ursula. She recalled the old days when she — Alice — a wayward, troublesome child, had looked up to the calm, stately, and beautiful elder cousin.

"Now I shall see her again—not all the fathers in the world can keep me from her," she thought. "I feel convinced I am going to hold her hand and to kiss her once more. It was a cruel, cruel thing to part us! To-day, I shall talk to her again; I feel convinced that such is the case. Oh, sweet children! and sweet white fairy, who have brought us together!"

When the carriage appeared, Alice and Deane got in.

"There is one thing," said Alice, "I don't mean—should she turn out to be the right person—to say a single word about how I found out her address. The children must



always believe that a real fairy sent them the Christmas gifts."

"But how will you explain?" asked Deane, in some wonder.

"Oh, trust me to find a way. I can say—oh, leave it to me—I am not a bit afraid; I will discover a way out of that difficulty pretty quickly."

"And am I to be silent?"

"I shall introduce you as a friend of mine."

She gave him a wistful glance—a sort of look which smote on his heart. He was fond of her, but he did not love her. She was well aware of this, but never had she boldly faced the fact that she passionately loved him.

Deane was quite right in saying that the distance between that home of all luxury—the Briary, of Campden Hill—was not very far from Asprey Gardens.

"What a pretty name! and what an ugly place!" said Alice, as the carriage took them quickly to No. 11. It drew up in front of the shabby house which, being older than most of its neighbours, had a certain importance about it.

Alice peeped out of the window.

"It would be like Ursula to have window-boxes," she said. "Oh, I wish there were flowers in them."

"There could not be flowers at this time of the year," said Deane.

"Did you observe *that*?" cried Alice.

"What?" he asked.

"I saw a child flash a look at me from an upper window. Can she be the dimpled one?"

"I expect so—this is quite exciting!" cried Deane.

"My heart beats so fast that I can scarcely contain myself," exclaimed Alice.

"Open the door and help me out, Stephen. Oh, Stephen, we forget the ways of the poor; I trust we are not calling at an inconvenient hour."

For answer, Stephen stepped out of the brougham and ran up the three steps of the shabby house. Alice quickly followed him.

"We must not have the door shut in our faces," she said—"we *must* go in. Now don't forget; do not even *whisper* about



the fairies ; if we see the children—and if the children speak of them, we are to pretend not to know.”

“ You may trust me,” said Stephen.

He had already rung the bell. After a minute, Jane—her squint more pronounced than usual—appeared. She opened the door little more than a foot, and peeped round it.

“ Is your mistress, Mrs. Sherwood, in ? ” said Alice.

“ Yes, mum—I think so, mum.”

“ This gentleman and I want to see her.”

“ Open the door a bit wider, Jane ! ” said a clear, high, childish voice in the background.

Jane looked back.

“ Go away—go up to your nursery, you bad boy ! ” she said.

“ No, I won’t—you have no manners,” answered the same speaker.

The next minute there was a scuffle—Jane vanished—the door was opened wide ; and Herbert, making his best bow, stood before Alice and Deane.

“ Mother’s in, and you may see her,” he said. “ It’s most exciting—your coming in

a carriage. Mags and I watched you from the nursery window. Mags is getting her face washed--she'll be down almost immediate. I'll show you the way."

He marched in front of the visitors, opened the door of a tiny room—saying: "Dear, dear! it is a bit cold, but then you don't want a fire in the room where you don't sit, do you?"—and ushered his visitors in.

"I'll get mother and bring her to you," he said. "She is awfully busy nursing father, but I know she'll come to see you; perhaps she'll have to change her dress—I'm not quite sure, but Mags and I can entertain you while she is doing it, can't we?"

"Of course you can," said Deane.

As to Alice, she felt so bewildered that she could not open her lips. When the door closed, however, behind Herbert, she turned to Deane and said with a sort of gasp—

"He reminds me of her; he has that wonderfully straight, upright sort of manner—I know he is her son. She is Ursula—she is. Oh, I *am* so happy!"



Deane said nothing. There was a rustling sound in the hall, and presently the brother and sister appeared, hand in hand.

"This is Mags," said Herbert. "Mags, make your curtsey—you don't often talk to carriage folks; but never mind, they're not nearly so 'portant as fairies."

"No," said Mags; "I don't 'ike 'em 'tall," she said, backing towards the door.

"Oh, come, you little darling, and kiss me!" said Alice.

"Don't want to tiss 'oo," said Mags; "tiss gen'leman," she added, glancing up at Deane, "but not 'oo—don't 'ike 'oo—'ike gen'leman—tiss him if he—wants to—bedy bad."

Deane stooped, lifted Mags in his arms and printed a kiss on her cheek. Herbert looked at his sister with dark eyes glowing with anger.

"You are rude!" he said—"don't mind her, lady. Mother's changing, and will be down in a minute."

"Has the fawries gived 'oo anyting nice for me?" asked the dimpled one of "gen'leman."

He shook his head.

"Don't 'ike 'oo," said Mags, who—in Herbert's opinion—was turning on the spot into a most despicable character. But at this instant, the situation was relieved by the appearance of Ursula herself on the scene. She came in swiftly, as was her manner.

"I hope you will forgive me, Mrs. ——" began Alice. Then her voice dropped. Ursula backed a little, then rushed forward. Alice met her half way.

"Alice!"

"Ursula!"

They were in each other's arms.

"It is too delightful for words!" whispered Herbert to himself.

As to Mags, she put a dimpled finger to a more dimpled mouth, and remained lost in solemn musing.

"Oh, Alice!" said Ursula.

"I think I'll go out for a bit, if you don't mind," said Deane.

"Alice," said Ursula, not taking the slightest notice of him, "you must come with me into the parlour, this room is much





“ ‘And you have come to me of your own accord.’ ”





too cold. Oh ! I scarcely know what I am doing. And you have come to me of your own accord. But how *did* you hear of me ? Of course I knew of you and where you were living, but I vowed I'd never come ; all the same, I wanted you. How happy I am Alice, Alice ! Let me kiss you again. Oh, Alice, I must show you my children. This is Herbert."

Ursula took the boy's hand.

"Are you a relation of my mother's ?" he asked.

"Yes ; oh, yes !" said Alice.

"And this is Margaret, my little girl."

Mags was dragged forward, very unwillingly.

"Mags hasn't been at all good," said Herbert. "She ought to be punished by not being allowed to kiss the lady who is a relation of our mother's."

But at this prohibition Mags burst into tempestuous weeping.

"It's gen'leman I want for 'lation," she said.

"I will be your best of best friends," said Deane.

He raised the little maid to his shoulder, mopping her tears away with his own handkerchief. By the time this deed was accomplished, Alice and Ursula had disappeared into the parlour. Just as she was leaving the room, Ursula turned and glanced at Herbert.

“Tell father what has happened, Herbert, and get Jane to light the fire here. Go up to father as soon as possible, Herbert, and tell him—he will be glad. Now, Alice—now—Oh, we have so much to say to each other!”

In the parlour Ursula completely gave herself away.

“It is not the fact that we are poor and you are rich; it is a much, much more important fact that we are closely related and love each other dearly,” she said. “It is just because of that that I am so happy to-day. But before I say another word or take you back at all to my very heart of hearts, I must make one remark.”

“What is that, darling?”

“You come as my friend—my cousin; you come to see me now quite independent



of your riches, and you don't love me the less because I am poor?"

"How could I?" said Alice. "The fact is, Ursula, I am sick of wealth. I don't think in all the world there can be anything quite so horrid as having too much money—so much that you don't know how to spend it—that you're so tired of spending it that the mere spending becomes the greatest weariness of all. Oh, how I have pined for just that one thing that is fifty times more valuable than money!"

"Yes, Alice, yes," said Ursula. "For love—there is nothing like love."

"I don't think I have anyone who really and truly loves me," said Alice. As to father—I am his daughter, and he will be good to me; but money, Ursula dearest, it has swallowed him up—it has made his heart so hard, his life seems to be all crusted over with it, until I don't think he can see an inch in front of his nose; because every single part of him is encrusted in that awful gold; he has built a wall of it round him, too—he can't get away from it wherever he turns. *His* love does not count for much,

for he loves gold so much better than me."

"Poor Uncle Oliver!" said Ursula, in a grave voice. "But, Alice, you must have many, many to care for you."

"Oh, yes—to care," she said with a certain petulance. "Miss Derwent *cares*—after her fashion; and—there are some poor people who shower blessings on me, but compared to you—I know you love your husband, and those children are too delightful."

"We will share some of the love of the children," said Ursula. "Herbert takes to you already. Mags avowedly prefers the other sex, and has never once hesitated to proclaim her preference; but she will give you a small bit of that funny little warm heart by and by. And you have not seen baby yet, but he is not six months old, and all his little character is folded up in the future."

"And your husband?" said Alice.

"My husband," said Ursula, with great emphasis, "is just himself. There never was his second."

"Then you are a very happy woman?"



“Happy?” she answered—“there are no words for my happiness.”

“But you look pale, and very thin; and you have a tired look round your eyes, and your—forgive me—your dress.”

“My dress is five years old, and a little out of fashion. Surely that is a small penance to pay for such a wealth of love.”

“Oh, I *do* believe I have found at last what I was always looking for!” said Alice. “I have found it in you—we won’t let each other go any more.”

“Alice,” said Ursula, “did you really, really not know where I lived?”

“Really I did not. I have never been able to ask father—you know how angry he was with you.”

“Yes,” said Ursula, a slight colour coming into her cheeks. “The craze for gold was so strong in him that he wanted to spoil my life; but I knew better. So he never speaks of me?”

“Never; and I don’t dare to speak—that is, I *did* not dare, in the past. He was so angry the last time I mentioned you that I have not broached the subject since.

But Ursula, I mean to break the spell to-night."

"Do you?" answered Ursula.

She was standing close to the fire, looking into the flames. Alice glanced round the room. The carpet was sadly worn, and there was no rug before the fire-place. Instead, there were several darns and one somewhat unsightly patch. Alice's eyes fell on this patch and her heart began to hurt her; for she herself was so rich, and it would have been a mere nothing to put a new carpet on that floor. But she no more dared to offer to do this than if the floor had been covered with pure jasper by the angels.

"Please, Alice," said Ursula, "tell me how you found me at last."

Alice had meant to make up a story.

"No," she answered gently, "I would rather not tell you—don't ask me."

"Very well," said Ursula. A flame of colour suffused her face, leaving it pale. "I am glad you have come to me," she said, "in whatever way you have come."

They talked a little longer, but they did



not mention money, nor its need, nor the fact that Sherwood had lost his post as sub-editor of that well-known weekly, *Moments of Leisure*. Ursula would not for worlds have let her rich cousin know how small was their credit at the bank, and how great were their expenses.

After a time, Alice went away, promising to call next day. A very smoky fire had meanwhile been lit in the tiny drawing-room, and when Alice and Ursula reappeared in the very narrow hall, they had a glimpse of Mags, sitting still astride of Deane's shoulder, and saying to him—

“I know what I'll call 'oo—not 'natty 'Mr. Deane,' but 'love.' I will call 'oo 'love.' ”

Deane kissed her. Alice and Deane took their seats once again in the brougham. Herbert conveyed Mags again to the nursery, where he reproved her most severely. But the small maiden was unabashed.

“I 'uv Mr. Love,” she said. And she was so pleased with herself for saying the magical word correctly, that it was impossible even for Herbert to scold her too persistently.

## CHAPTER VII.

IT was several years now since Alice Langton had made the acquaintance of Stephen Deane. Stephen had first been brought to the Briary by Mr. Langton. He was the son of a city acquaintance. The smart, bright-looking young fellow had attracted the notice of the older gentleman. Oliver Langton was the sort of man who did nothing for nothing. He wanted a young confidential clerk, who would enter his business with a view, perhaps, of a small partnership some day. Langton had a long conversation with the older Deane, and the result was that Stephen entered the great firm of "Langton and Cross" when he was little more than twenty-one years of age. Already, however, he had received an excellent education, had entered Cambridge



at eighteen, and had come straight from his 'Varsity career to his city life. He would have chosen another employment had such been possible, but Deane thought there were many advantages in the proposal which Langton made to him. He urged his son to make the most of a good thing, and young Deane was the last sort of man to throw away his chances. It was in his nature to take thoroughly to heart and to act on the grand old text, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might."

Now it so happened that such a kindly, gentlemanly, intelligent young man was the very sort that Langton most appreciated. From the first he took special notice of Deane, treating him almost as though he were his son.

"You will be interested in this, my boy, for some day the business will be primarily in your hands," he would say; or, "You had best go into this matter, for it will be important to your future to understand about it now."

Deane was sufficiently keen to please the old man, and yet he had no real love in his

nature for making money. Enough would have satisfied him, and his idea of enough was very different from that of Langton's. He supposed himself to be a man of great penetration of character, but as a matter of fact old Langton was too deep for him and he did not see the shady side of his nature. With regard to doubtful speculations, Deane was kept in the dark. For the rest, he had quite enough to do attending to the *bonâ fide* business of the great firm.

Years went by, and the young man rose higher and higher in the firm. He was not confidential manager, but he was practically Langton's private secretary, and as such was with his chief at all hours. It was just about this time that the older Deane died and left Stephen what property he had accumulated. Stephen Deane found himself the owner of something like £50,000. This money he put without the slightest hesitation into Langton's firm, receiving excellent interest on it, and being thoroughly satisfied that he had made a wise investment. Langton, however, had no special designs on Deane, until one day when he was having



a long talk with Alice. This talk took place two or three weeks before the real events of this story opened. One of Langton's city friends had proposed to the wealthy old merchant for his only child. The match would have been a good one, and Langton was quite willing to sacrifice Alice, as he had been before to sacrifice Ursula, on the altar of Mammon; but Alice, like Ursula, was equally determined not to be sold for money.

"I don't care for Mr. Henderson, father," she said, "he is too old and too ugly, and——"

"Any further objections?" asked Langton.

"Those two objections are sufficient, but there is a third. I don't love him—I won't marry any man whom I don't love."

Langton was just then entering on that path of pure panic which would so soon demoralise and wreck his whole nature, but the worst had not yet happened, and it was with no thought of saving himself that he appealed to his child.

"Money is not to be despised," he said. "I think Henderson is rich."

"I despise money, if I am to be sold for it," replied Alice. "I don't love Mr. Henderson—I don't even like him. I won't marry him."

There was a look of Ursula in her face as she uttered the words, and Langton gazed at her attentively. He had never mentioned her cousin's name for many years, and he would not draw a parallel now between Ursula's conduct and Alice's. After a time he said—

"I am sorry. Is there no chance of your altering your determination?"

"I don't want to marry anyone," she replied. She came up to him as she spoke, nestled against his side, and drew his arm round her waist. "I have got you," she said, looking up at him and kissing him. He felt the warmth of her presence, and a faint throb of fatherhood awoke within him.

"But you must marry, child," he said. "It would be ludicrous to leave the money. I hope to leave to an old maid. I want to see my grand-children before I die. How old are you, Alice?"



"Twenty-one."

"It is time for you to marry."

"I will marry no one whom I don't love," she said, and she had hardly uttered the words before Deane entered the room. It needed but one glance into the girl's face for old Langton to possess himself of her secret. She cared for Deane. He was slightly staggered, but he did not for a single moment betray his emotion. He looked attentively at Stephen Deane, noticed his upright figure, his handsome face, his good bearing. He knew all about Deane, and Deane, although scarcely rich according to Langton's lights, had nevertheless a patrimony.

All during that night he pondered over the subject of Alice's marriage with Deane. The more he thought of it the better he liked it. Such a marriage would keep all the money in the firm. He need never account to Deane as to how he had really invested some of that £50,000. Alice would be happy, Deane, of course, would be in raptures. They might both live at the Briary. The house was large enough for

many families. Langton was the sort of man who, when once he had settled his heart upon a thing, lost very little time in bringing it to pass. It did not occur to him, even for a moment, that Stephen Deane did not care for Alice as much as he was now certain she cared for him. Of course the young fellow would be only too glad to jump at such a chance. He pretended, of course, that he did not care primarily for money, but Langton put all this down to pure nonsense and determined to give Deane a very broad hint with regard to his wishes during the Christmas holidays.

On the day that Stephen and Alice had gone to see the Sherwoods, Langton returned home early from the City. He was saved. The great calamity was averted. Ursula's money had done the deed. Ursula was in all probability dead. She was the pale, willowy sort of creature who was scarcely likely to live long. She had married a very poor man, he had heard nothing whatever about her since. Oh, of course she was dead; were she living, she would be certain to write to him. Catch a poor



woman letting a rich relation alone ! He was given to understand that she had married a financial beggar, a man with hardly a penny. Langton classed his fellow-men in two broad divisions—the rich, who were great ; the poor, who were small. Sherwood belonged to the small folk. Probably he and his wife had gone under long ago. Yes, he had a right to use the money, for there was no Ursula Sherwood ; at least, he knew nothing about her. Were such a thing ever to occur as that Ursula turned up again, he would make it up to her in some sort of fashion, but at present he might be quite happy on the subject.

Langton had a particularly luxurious private brougham, which was always at hand for his special use. He had gone to the City that morning, and had dismissed Deane with a curt yet kindly nod.

“ Go and amuse Alice,” he said, “ she is all by herself ; I don’t want you to-day. You might mention to Alice that I shall probably be back to luncheon. Get off with you, Deane. There is nothing to be done during the Christmas holidays.”

What very little business was in evidence Langton himself attended to. He saw his confidential clerk, a very different man from Deane, and ascertained that the money from Auckland was placed to his credit in the bank. This was good. He wrote a few necessary cheques, took steps for some other gigantic speculations, and eased in his mind and with quite a feeling of Christmas cheer about his heart, stepped into his brougham and desired the coachman to take him home. On the way home, so genial was his mood, so little did his conscience smite him, that he began to wonder if he could not take immediate steps for the happiness of his child. Deane, of course, poor fellow, would be shy of speaking with regard to Alice, he would naturally believe her to be greatly his superior. Langton could put him right with regard to this, could assure him of his own favour, tell him that he himself would not oppose the match, and in short make his child happy without in the least undermining her dignity.

He was thinking of these things as the brougham rolled up the avenue and stopped



before the front porch. Another brougham made way for it, and when Langton stepped out on to the front steps he was confronted by both Deane and Alice. Alice's eyes were brighter than he had seen them for a long time and her cheeks were rosy with intense delight and excitement. At such times she was a really handsome girl, and her father looked at her now with delight.

"Well, child," he said. "Ah! Deane, how do you do over again? So you took my advice and came along here. Thought you would, somehow—thought you would. And what have you been doing, Alice? I see that you and Deane have been out together, and are doubtless planning one of your usual charities."

"Oh no, father," replied his daughter, "not that for a moment. But something wonderful has happened."

He did not ask her what it was, as he was in a hurry to get into the house out of the cold.

"I am hungry," he said. "Is luncheon ready?"

"It is about time for lunch," said

Alice. "I will go up and take off my things. I will tell you my adventures afterwards."

Langton showed no curiosity. Alice flitted up the wide low stairs, and her father and Deane watched her. Just as she turned the corner she waved her hand at them both.

"Pretty girl, eh?" said Langton, looking at Deane.

"Yes, sir, very nice-looking," said Deane.

Langton gave him a glance which seemed to measure the young man from head to foot.

"I want to have a special talk with you, my boy, in the course of the day," he said.

"You lunch with us, of course, and—and dine. By the way, at this Christmas season you might as well send for your kit and spend a few days with us. James can go to your diggings after lunch and bring what you want over."

"Thank you very much indeed, Mr. Langton, but I fear I cannot manage that. The next few evenings are engaged."

"Oh, as you please," said Langton. He was quite silent for a minute. He was the



last man to press his hospitality on another. They both went into the luxuriously appointed dining-room. Alice quickly reappeared, and lunch proceeded without let or hindrance. When it was all over Alice, with that bright expectant look still on her face, went up to her father.

“I have something most, most exciting to tell you,” she said. “I have lived through a wonderful morning. I cannot express all that it has meant to me. I am certain you will be equally pleased. May I tell you now?”

Langton looked from her to Deane. He misinterpreted the expression on the young man's face. It seemed to him that Deane must have almost told Alice those things that he ought not to have uttered without Langton's gracious permission. Langton therefore said, a little stiffly, “I will hear you presently. I came back on purpose to have a chat with Deane. Stephen, shall we go into the conservatory and have a smoke?”

“If you like,” replied Deane.

Alice's eye seemed to say, “Invite me

too. Why leave me out in the cold ? ” But her father took no notice. He preceded Deane into one of the great conservatories which ran along the southern side of the house. Before Deane could join him, Alice ran up to the young man’s side. “ Please understand, Stephen, not a word about Ursula until I first break the news to father.”

“ Certainly not, Alice,” he answered. He then joined Langton in the conservatory. Langton offered him a cigar from his own favourite brand. For a few minutes the older and the younger man smoked in silence. Then Langton took the cigar from his mouth and dropped into a chair.

“ I have a good bit to talk over with you, Stephen,” he said. “ Sit down, won’t you ? You are in no special hurry ? ”

“ No, sir.”

“ I thought not. There are few places more altogether pleasant for a young man than the Briary—eh, my boy ?—eh ? ”

“ Few places truly, Mr. Langton.”

“ I thought it would be like that,” said Langton, in a tone of intense satisfaction,



"Now, Stephen, I am going to be very frank with you."

Stephen wondered what was coming.

"How long have you been in my office?"

"I am twenty-six," said Stephen. "I have been with you five years."

"Of course, of course; how could I forget? You like the business, eh?"

"As well as I could like any business, sir; but I don't believe, strictly speaking, that I am a business man."

"Yes you are, Stephen. Let me assure you that on that point you underrate yourself. You were meant by nature to be a right good man of business. Don't you think anything else, my boy. There are two classes of men in the world—fools and wise men. The wise man understands the art of getting rich, the fool understands the full measure of poverty. You belong to the former class."

Stephen was silent. He was accustomed to old Langton's maxims and never troubled himself to reply to them.

"Yes," said Langton, after another pause

and a vigorous smoke, "I liked your father before you and I like you. You are not rich, far from it, although you have—yes—a competency. Fifty thousand at five per cent. is a competency. It means a few thousand a year, just enough to struggle on, no more. Of course I don't say that you are ever likely to die of hunger, but if you were to stop working now, I could not call you a rich man."

Stephen was still silent. After a pause, he said, "Is not 'enough' riches? The fact is, I'm quite satisfied with the amount my dear father left me, and if I never earned a penny more should think myself in luck. I work with you because I like occupation."

"And not for the pleasure of the thing?" asked Langton, glaring at him angrily.

"Certainly not for the pleasure—no."

"Then, sir, let me tell you, you under-value the greatest power that man possesses. A rich man can do anything—build a cathedral, start an orphanage, erect a city, support hundreds of indigent folks or aggrandise his own family—go into Parliament and



“speak for the good of the nation. A rich man can do either great things or little things. A poor man is hampered at every turn.”

“Yes, sir, it is true.”

“Don’t underrate the power of riches.”

“Very well, Mr. Langton, I will try not to.”

“Listen to me, Deane. Riches are within your grip. You have but to hold out your hand to secure them. How many would envy you! You are in the position to me of—of a son.”

Deane started. The colour came into his cheeks.

“You have been very good to me, sir,” he said, “but I fail to understand.”

Langton did not reply at all at first. He went on smoking, then he rose and paced from end to end of the great conservatory. The noble building was redolent with perfume and brilliant with blossom. Always to his dying day Deane remembered an enormous plant of heliotrope that stood within a hand’s throw of where he was seated. He turned away from the scent

ever after as long as he lived. By and by Langton returned.

"You and Alice pull very well together," he said.

"Who would not like your daughter?" was Deane's response.

"I am not saying, my dear sir, who would or would not like Alice. Doubtless, there is scarcely a young unmarried man in the whole of London who would not gladly think of Alice, but let me assure you she marries to please me."

"I think, sir," said Deane, colouring brightly, "that if I am not mistaken Miss Alice will marry to please herself."

"But listen," thundered the old man, "she won't get her fortune unless she pleases me!"

Deane longed to say, "That being the case, she is the sort of girl who would do without a fortune," but he was silent. He only heartily wished the interview, whatever it portended, would come to an end.

"Now listen to me, Deane. I have beat about the bush long enough. There is scarcely anyone who would not be proud



to have Alice to wife. She might marry into the higher ranks of the nobility ; she might do anything. But, honestly, I wish for her happiness. To be plain, I won't deny her to *you*. I know you want her—you are an old friend and the son of an old friend. Your money, your £50,000, can stay in the business and produce cent. per cent. for your benefit—cent. per cent. for your benefit. What do you say? It is easy to know what she feels, it is easy to know what you feel. You are quite right to keep back any expression of your feelings until I give the word. I have given the word. Be happy, my boy ; say anything you like to Alice, I won't stand in your way."

As Langton said the last words he stood up, came close to Deane, and patted him on the shoulder. "You are a good boy," he said ; "you were quite right not to lead to this matter until I gave the word. Naturally it is a great rise for you. I see you are bewildered. No wonder—not a word to me at present. You can go and have a talk with Alice whenever you like."

Before Deane could reply a servant en-

tered the conservatory. He brought a telegram for Langton. Langton tore open the little yellow envelope and acquainted himself with its contents, which evidently caused him considerable annoyance.

"Tell Thompson to bring round my brougham immediately," he said. He turned to Deane. The paternal expression had quite faded from his face. "I have to go back to the City. Nothing to worry you, of course. We have just got information from South Africa, and if I don't act on it, certain bad news will be all over the place to-morrow and there will be a panic. I can stop that. Tell Alice to expect me when she sees me—good-bye."

He disappeared. Stephen had a view of his broad back. He caught a glimpse of his cheek, flushed with prosperity and good living, he observed his contour, the bushy whiskers, the attempt at a beard; he noticed the rotund figure, the massive shoulders, the short neck, puffy and red. Langton disappeared and Deane was left all alone. His ears were tingling, his heart beating. His one and earnest desire was to go, to



get out of the place, to vanish altogether from sight ; but before he could attempt anything of the sort Alice came up, her eyes bright, the colour still in her cheeks, a new grace and expectancy about her. She tripped down the steps from the great yellow drawing-room and confronted him.

“ Why, Stephen,” she said, “ what is the matter with father ? He has gone off in a fearful hurry, and he looks as red as a turkey cock.”

“ He ought to be careful,” said Stephen, rousing himself with an effort. “ He has just had a telegram and is obliged to return to the City. Why will he work so hard ? ”

“ Oh, why indeed ? ” said Alice. But she said it in a voice of little anxiety. Her idea with regard to City fathers was that they always worked exceedingly hard, and her father was no exception to the rule. After a minute she said, “ Are you going to spend the day here ? ”

“ I think not. I am going almost immediately.”

She looked full up at him. It was she who was calm now, almost unconcerned.

It was he who was filled with a hidden dismay, with a secret and to him terrible understanding.

"Dear Stephen," said the girl, "what is it?"

"Oh, nothing at all, Alice."

"By the way, father wanted to say something special to you. What was that?"

"Nothing. I mean nothing of consequence. I think I will go now."

"What a pity," she said, "and the drawing-room is so comfortable, and I told Thompson not to admit any visitors. We could have had such a talk over Ursula, and the dimpled maiden, and little Herbert, and—and the great, great gift of love *versus* gold."

"You will always believe in that, won't you?" he said, and he took her hand and pressed it with sudden warmth in his own. He had never looked at her with quite that expression in his eyes before. She felt her heart beat.

"I hate gold," she said. Then she added, her face turning pale as she slowly withdrew her hand, "But I have never known love, never, since Ursula went away."



"Surely that must be impossible," he said.

He did not love her, but she had never seemed to him more attractive, more gentle, more womanly than now.

"I have never known love," she repeated, "since Ursula went, and even Ursula's love was the love of one girl for another. I don't think it will be my lot ever to know the greatest love, Stephen."

"Why so?" he answered. "Surely a man will come along who will think of you as the first of all women."

"No," she replied, "he will think of my gold, not of me. It is my unhappy lot to be the daughter of a very rich man. I shall never, like Ursula, find love instead of gold."

"You don't know, you may," he said. He wondered why the words trembled to his lips, why he thought her so utterly sweet that he marvelled that he did not fling all that he possessed at her feet; but he also knew that he did not love her, that he could never love her as a man loves the one and only woman.

"I must go," he said. "I will come back to-morrow, perhaps this evening. Good-bye for the present."

She sat down by the great plant of heliotrope after he had left her and remained there a long time lost in musings. All her thoughts were centred round Stephen. What did that new look in his face mean? Why that conscious look should come upon that most unconscious face she could not understand. She was absorbed, and her heart beat fast. There was something about the atmosphere of the place which made her even forget her cousin Ursula.



## CHAPTER VIII.

IT was late that evening when Langton returned home. His business in the City turned out to be of the most urgent nature. That is a true old saying which testifies to the fact that troubles seldom come in single file. Another speculation of Langton's had, if not fallen through, yet come very far short of his expectations. Nevertheless, ruin was absolutely averted.

As he drove back to his luxurious home, he thought with satisfaction of the sixty thousand pounds which had saved him. He had come to regard this money as absolutely his own and had very nearly forgotten Ursula's existence.

"I have done well," he kept saying to himself, "and Alice and Deane shall marry as soon as ever they like. I can give the

child a hint to-night ; that is, if it is necessary ; but I should not be a bit surprised if Deane himself did not speak out after I left him. Never saw a young fellow look more flabbergasted ; but why not ? it was enough to stagger any man to think he might aspire to my Alice—my Alice, with all that she herself and her wealth mean.”

The carriage drew up at the porch. Langton alighted and went straight to his room. There he dressed for dinner. When he was dressed, he went down to the drawing-room. Alice was there alone. Langton half expected that Deane, in an altogether new relationship, might be also waiting for him.

“ Ah ! my little girl,” said her father, “ so there you are. Well, I’m a bit tired, but I’m not grumbling. When a man has all the heavy cares on his shoulders which rest on mine he can’t look for much of a holiday.”

“ You ought to have had one, father. It is quite a shame,” said his daughter.

“ Well, it is over for the present,” said Langton ; “ and I shall enjoy a cosy evening with you.”



He looked at her attentively; it was evident from her face that Deane had said nothing as yet. "I respect him all the more for that," the old man thought. But, nevertheless, a vague sense of uneasiness did come over him. He was in the mood to be extra affectionate to his daughter. He put his arm now round her waist and drew her close to him.

"You and I will pull along very well to-night, eh?" he said. "But why don't you wear your diamonds? I like to see them sparkling round your pretty throat."

"Oh, father, my throat isn't pretty; it is too brown and too thin, and, besides, I can't wear diamonds every night."

"Pooh! child, pooh! Why should you not wear them? The pretty sparklers won't wear out—they're warranted to last, I can tell you—nothing of the Parisian diamonds about them, I can tell you."

She smiled.

"After dinner I have something to say to you," she remarked.

"Of course; so you have! Well, I will listen—it strikes me we are going to have

a pleasant evening. But before you open that dear little mouth of yours to relate your news, you shall have mine first."

"Have you news for me, father?"

"A pretty considerable bit of news, Miss Alice. Ah, you're colouring! Wonder if you can guess?—not quite sure? That's the dinner gong. Let's come along and eat; I am hungry. When a man comes to my age and works as hard as I do, his dinner comes before most news, I can tell you, missie. You will find that out for yourself some day."

Alice smiled, took her father's arm, and led him into the smaller dining-room—a very cosy apartment, which they invariably used when quite alone.

During dinner Langton made many remarks all full of subtle meaning—could Alice but possess herself of the key!

"The house is too big," he said.

"Father, what do you mean?"

"I mean that it might hold another family. Why, we have three great dining-rooms and two drawing-rooms; and my lady's boudoir and her morning-room; and



then, of course, there is the library, and my so-called study, and my sanctum sanctorum, and the smoking-room, and the billiard-room—a good few sitting-rooms for a little brown girl and her elderly dad—eh? Alice—eh?”

“Yes, father,” said Alice. She had a vision of Ursula in these rooms—Ursula, and her sweet children! “We could fill them,” she said, with a smile.

“So we could,” he answered, his eyes dancing. Each was thinking thoughts quite independent of, and far divided from, the other.

When dinner was over, Alice said—

“I am going into your sanctum sanctorum.”

“No, my little girl; you don’t care for that room.”

“But you like to rest your dear head against your own special old armchair, and you can smoke to any extent without the fear of Alice minding.”

“Alice never minded; Alice was always a good girl,” said her father.

“Very well; she will prove her good-

ness. We will go to the sanctum to-night."

They retired to the little room which opened into the conservatory where Langton and Deane had talked together that very afternoon. There was a great fire of logs of wood on the hearth, a turkey rug was spread invitingly in front of the fire. Langton pulled up his armchair; Alice filled his pipe, and gave it to him. Then she sat at his feet. She had her own reasons for coming to this room; for in the days when Ursula lived at the Briary, the two girls were fond of making Langton happy in his own special den. It was in this very room, too, that Ursula had declared her firm resolve never to marry money when love was offered to her. Langton, too, smiled when he found himself in the sanctum. He recalled his interview with Deane. They had gone through that door; they had entered the conservatory; they had spoken.

"Now then, Alice," he said, "my news first; afterwards yours."

"I hope, father," replied the daughter,



“that your news has nothing to do with mere money.”

“Hark to the child!” cried the old merchant. “I wonder what she would do without mere money.”

Alice took no notice.

“Because I don’t want any more presents,” she continued. “I have more jewellery than I know what to do with; in short, I am that rather unhappy young person who hasn’t an unfulfilled desire.”

“Are you not glad I am such a good father? But what about a husband, eh? What about peopling the old house with—oh, you know the sort of things—little voices—little faces—the cheerful sounding of little steps. Don’t blush, child. When a man marries he expects to have children. There’s no shame in it, child. I have a kind of desire to have my grand-children about me before I die. There’s nothing wrong in the wish—it is natural enough.”

“Oh, but father——” Alice’s hand no longer rested on his knee. She started to her feet. The colour which redeemed her and made her almost beautiful had re-

turned to her cheeks. "Father!" she continued.

"Allie, I know just what you are going to say. You're a queer girl in some ways, you have a crank in you just as——" he very nearly mentioned Ursula's name, but not quite—"as others," he concluded. "But you needn't be afraid in this case; I believe that love and gold will go hand in hand."

Alice stared hard at him; the pretty colour faded from her cheeks; her eyes grew a little anxious.

"I could have chosen quite a different son-in-law; but there—I'm not a regular curmudgeon—I don't want to break young hearts. What do you say to Deane, now, for a husband—your own special crony—Stephen Deane?"

Alice turned, and with her little foot pushed one of the logs on the blazing hearth into position. She did not speak at all, but her lips were very white.

"If you want him, he's there. I wonder he didn't say something to-day."

"Father! Did—you—speak to him?"



“Trust me, child ; I did nothing to lower your dignity. I only gave him to understand there would be no opposition as far as *I* am concerned. Why, Alice, you little goose, it doesn't require as keen an eye as mine to see that the man is head over ears in love with you.”

## CHAPTER IX.

ALICE LANGTON's eyes grew very soft. For the first time in all her life they were quite lovely. As a rule their expression was clever, keen, but a trifle hard. Now the velvet depths of a slowly opening flower seemed to be revealed within them.

She glanced shyly at her father; then she sank down by his side, took his gnarled old hand and kissed it.

"Are you sure?" she said in the lowest of whispers.

"I am just as sure as I am sitting here that Stephen Deane would give the world to possess you, Alice."

"But he has never said a word," said the girl. "He has never spoken to me—he has never even hinted anything," she repeated.



Old Langton rose to his feet.

"What else would you expect of the boy?" was his remark. "Is it likely that he would dare to presume to say a word of love to my daughter? Alice, if there is anything wanting in you, it is dignity. You don't presume enough—you're not imperious enough. You don't quite understand what your true position is. Girls no better than you have married into the best houses in England. What about this craze of our nobility to take rich American wives? And what American girl could touch you, with your pure English blood, and your untold English money? But, as I said, I want to make you happy; and I like Deane. I gave him to understand that if he was lucky enough to win you, I'd not stand in the way. Have I done right, my child? Are you angry with me?"

"Oh, no! I am not angry," she answered.

She was trembling from head to foot. She could only with difficulty restrain her emotion. After a time, she said—

"When you—you spoke—did he—say?"

—was he greatly—oh, father, father! I *must* confide in you—I *must*!”

The next words came out rapidly—

“I have cared for him almost since I knew him. There has never been another man quite like Stephen to me—I have met many, but they seemed hardly worth considering; I looked at Stephen and heard him speak; I did not dare to tell even my own heart of all that he was to me, but you have broken the ice. I think had he married another I should have been—oh, very unhappy! too unhappy almost—to bear it! But, father, I must speak out to-night. I never thought that he specially cared for me. Did he tell you so, father? Relieve my mind—oh, relieve it. Did he speak as though—he was glad—did he—lead the way—or did *you*—*you*—suggest the thing?”

“I can’t tell you anything,” said the merchant. “I spoke as I thought it right to speak. I should not have alluded to the subject were I not certain. He was a bit stunned, naturally. I could see that he was overcome with joy—that, surely, was



also natural. Before he could say anything I had to hurry away. Have you seen him since ? ”

“ Yes, for a few minutes.”

“ He said nothing ? ”

“ Nothing. He pleaded an engagement and left me.”

“ I saw he was greatly overcome,” said Langton. “ I am glad he takes the matter seriously. Rest happy, Alice. He cares for you—as he ought. You might have done better, but I won’t say anything about that. He is a good fellow ; he will make you a good husband. We can have the wedding in the spring—you can both live here—the sooner the better, as far as I am concerned. I want young life about the old place. Stephen and I will practically hold the business between us after he is your husband. Things are turning out exactly as I should wish.”

Alice sat very still now, her hands still resting on her father’s knee, her eyes looking into the dancing flames of the fire. She was seeing pictures there. She was building a castle for herself out of unsubstantial

and unreal materials. Her golden dream seemed to fill her very life. She was never to know a more blissful moment than this. It altered the contour of her face. Langton, too, was pleased with himself; he was doing well by his child. He was really sacrificing some of his great ambitions just to make Alice happy. As he looked at her now, he could not help thinking how very close had been the shave which he had run—how near he had been to absolute disgrace and ruin. But for that timely stroke of luck—it was thus he called it to himself—poor little Alice would have been hearing very different news just then. After a time, he said—

“Well, that’s my news; I hope you liked it. It means wedding bells, a trousseau, a good husband, a happy bride. Now for your news, Alice. You said you had something to tell the old man.”

“Oh, I have!” she answered, the thought of Ursula returning in a great rush of love and longing to her mind. “Father, I don’t think you can be angry on such a happy—such a beautiful night as this.



I feel that whatever I say to you to-night you will take in good part."

Langton did not know why he suddenly felt uneasy.

"Don't try me too far," he said. "I admit that I am in a gracious mood—I am pleased with regard to the matter we have just talked over—but I don't want worry. If you have anything of a worrying nature to communicate, don't spoil the evening with it."

"It ought not to worry you," she said. "I must tell it, and you must listen." She rose from her place by his side and stood before him, her hands lightly clasped together.

"There were two little children," she began. "I can't tell you how pretty the story is, father. They talked together a few days back about Christmas and a certain white fairy."

"I'm not interested in ordinary children," said Langton.

"You must hear my story; I will make it as brief as possible. Stephen" (Alice blushed as she mentioned his name) "was

in Kensington Gardens. He heard the children talk. They wanted a great many things to make Christmas happy."

"Most people do," grunted Langton.

"These children," continued Alice, "were not selfish; they wanted things for others—in especial for their father and mother. They did not notice Stephen; I don't think they saw him. The eldest child was a boy, the little one a girl. Stephen took down a list of the things they wished a certain most magical white fairy to bring them. Afterwards he followed them and their funny little nursemaid home. He did not know their names. They lived in a place called Asprey Gardens."

"Never heard of it," said Langton.

"Nor did I," continued Alice; "but the place is in reality quite close to us. It is a row of shabby little houses looking on to the wall of a brewery in South Kensington."

Langton slightly yawned. He held out his empty pipe to Alice.

"Fill it for me again, little girl," he said. She got the tobacco pouch and obeyed,



knocking out the ashes and filling it skilfully. Having settled it, she returned it to her father. He smoked in great content. Alice's story was certainly unexciting, but she looked young, happy, pretty—it was nice to watch her.

“Stephen and I determined,” continued the girl, “to act the white fairy for the occasion.”

“Just like you,” grunted Langton.

“We got everything, and we took the good cheer in a cab to the house on Christmas Eve. We put it inside the hall as soon as ever the door was opened, and Stephen said that it was for the children and was sent by the white fairy.”

“Upon my word!” said Langton. “Pretty sort of lies to bring children up on.”

Alice smiled, but took no notice.

“This morning,” she continued, “something happened. I told you that we didn't know the names of the children, nor who were the people who lived in the house—No. 11, Asprey Gardens. But those clever people could not receive their gifts without

some sort of acknowledgment. They put a message into the 'Agony Column' of the *Times*. You may look at it, if you like."

"Don't want to, Alice; don't care enough. Well, you helped them in their necessity, and they thanked you—that's the end, isn't it?"

"No, father," said Alice; "I trust with all my heart that it is only the beginning."

"What do you mean?"

"When," continued Alice, "the children thanked the white fairy for the Christmas gifts they called themselves by their name."

"Yes? Nothing in that, I suppose?"

"A good deal, as far as I am concerned. When I saw the name, I was so overcome that I ordered the brougham—my own brougham—and went with Stephen straight to the quaint little house in the ugly street, and went indoors and asked to see the lady of the house. And the lady came to me, and — father — she was — *Ursula!* — *our* Ursula! I kissed her, and she kissed me. I have found her again! Father, what is the matter? How white you look! Oh,



I was so glad to see her once more. She is altered, but not much. She is dreadfully poor as far as money is concerned, but she is so rich in love. She says she wants for nothing, because love makes her warm. She is beautiful. She is good. I have found her again ; I never mean to let her go. Why, father——”

Langton had risen ; his pipe had dropped with a crash on the floor. He did not take any notice of the fact. He went close up to Alice. Alice did not shrink from him.

“I know how cruel you have always been with regard to Ursula,” she continued. “You never would let me mention her name, and I am not asking you now to do anything to help her. But she is my cousin, and I claim her as my cousin and my friend, and I will see a great deal of her and of her husband and children. Why—father——!”

“You will not,” said Langton.

He had not been able to articulate a single word up to the present.

“I told you, Alice, when that—that false girl left us, you were never to see her again. You obeyed me.”

“I was a child at the time,” said Alice, “but I am a woman now.”

“You refuse any longer to obey your father?”

“In that particular—yes.”

“I repeat my injunction to you, Alice. It remains with yourself whether you cross me in this matter or not. Ursula Sherwood—as she is now called—left me for ever and of her own free will several years ago. I would have done well for her; I would have given her to a man who could have supported her, not only in comfort, but in luxury. She scorned my proposal; she spoke cruel words—yes, cruel words to one who had been as a father to her. She refused even to consider the matter on which I had set my heart. Had Ursula married then—as I wished her to marry—matters would have been very different in my firm now. I could have established a connection with Hazlitt, who would have helped me in my business.”

“But, father,” said Alice, in some surprise, “surely your business for long years now has been prosperous of the prosperous.”



“Yes,” he answered, “you are right ; but at the same time you have little idea of the ups and downs of a speculative life like mine. A man in my position cannot have too many backers in case of need. Hazlitt is one of the richest and most influential men on the Stock Exchange. He could, and would, have been my right hand had Ursula accepted him. But when she utterly scorned him, he turned against me, and for the last ten years and more has been my enemy, doing what little he could to compass my ruin. These things are all wide of the mark, but they tell on a man’s feelings. I have no cause to love your cousin.”

“She was your sister’s child,” murmured Alice.

“Ah, yes, poor Amy !” said Langton. He began to pace up and down the room. “Amy would never have treated me so,” he continued. “She was always the very essence of gentleness and—submission. Ursula, doubtless, took after her father. Be that as it may, Alice, I will not be crossed now. Ursula chose her portion. As she

made her bed so she must lie on it. I will have nothing to do with her—you understand."

"I understand your point of view," said Alice. "I am exceedingly sorry, but I wish to say now that it makes no difference to me."

"No difference! What do you mean?"

"I mean this. Father, I personally will not accept your views. My heart was empty for Ursula. I have found her again. I mean often in the future to see her, I love her deeply. I also love her sweet children and that good husband, whom I have never seen. Yes, father—I will do what I think best in this matter; and let me say something more. I consider your attitude absolutely unworthy. Father—I will never give Ursula up—I regard her as my sister. She is my greatest woman friend. I have been hungry for her—I am hungry still."

While Alice was speaking, Langton's face underwent a quick change. After a short silence, he said—

"I forgot myself just now—you startled



me with your news—I will speak to you in the morning. Now, leave me.”

“Must I?” asked the daughter, a little wistfully.

“Yes; go at once. I won’t be trifled with.”

Alice recognised the tone. She obeyed. She left the room.

When he found himself quite alone, Langton stood and stared into the fire. All of a sudden, and at the very moment of supposed victory, just when his firm was secure from bankruptcy, and the dear wish of his heart that Alice and Deane should marry was about to be fulfilled, a very frightful danger stared him in the face. He was a thief. He had stolen sixty thousand pounds which belonged to Ursula. The money had come to him at a moment when he was morally unable to resist the temptation to apply it to his own great needs. The temptation to which he was subjected had been a sore one. A man who was now in his grave had made a will in his favour, leaving him sixty thousand pounds, to all appearance as if it was absolutely for

his own use. This might be seen in Somerset House, and not the faintest suspicion would be aroused as to its veracity. No one in all the world knew about the private letter which told him that this money was left to him in trust—that it was in reality meant for another. Well, he had committed the foul deed; he had stolen sixty thousand pounds; he could not recall it now if he would. That miserable salve to his conscience—his faint hope that Ursula might not be living—was dashed to the ground. She was alive. She had children. She was poor. Faster and faster did the unhappy man pace the floor. What was he to do? He must not be too cruel to Ursula. No—his conduct must be guided by prudence, but he could not see her—he could not bear even for a moment to look into her face. Alice must have her own way, he supposed, but she must on no account bring Ursula to the Briary. Some day, perhaps, he would make up to his niece for the money he had stolen, but not now.

As he paced the floor on this awful night,



when his grievous sin with all the consequences stared him in the face, he felt as one might feel who already stood before an angry judge. Yes—God Almighty was angry, but the man was not going to repent; he would have done the deed again if he could.

## CHAPTER X.

STEPHEN DEANE had rooms in St. James's Street. They were very comfortable, for he had never in the real sense of the word lacked money. He arrived there on this dull December evening, switched on his electric light, poked his fire into a blaze, and sank into a chair. In truth this very calm, very steadfast, very good man, was bewildered. He could scarcely contain himself—Langton's words had taken him by surprise. His very breath came quickly as he recalled what Langton had said, but it was not for a single moment the thought of Alice's wealth that dazzled him. The idea of being a very rich man had no special attraction to him. Not that he despised money, he knew quite well what great wealth nobly spent might mean. This part, how-



ever, of the situation scarcely appealed to him, it was the thought of Alice herself. He felt that in a measure her father's words had degraded her. He had the deepest admiration for her, he liked her, as he said to himself, better than any other woman. As to love, well, he had really never loved. He was twenty-six years of age, but up to the present he had met no one girl who had taken his heart by storm.

The next day he went early to the office. Early as he was, however, Langton was there before him; he called Deane at once into his private room. "I don't want you at all to-day, my boy."

"But surely, sir, there must be a great deal to be done."

"Nothing that you can do."

"You don't look well, sir."

Deane looked with a mixture of perturbation and affection at the older man. Langton had not lived through the misery of the previous night without showing traces of what he had undergone.

"I am all right now," he said, in a restive tone; "and, hark you, my boy, if you and

I have much to say to one another in the future, I don't want my looks commented on. A man with the cares that I willingly carry on my broad back must needs sometimes show signs of storm and stress. But remarks on such things are unacceptable—you comprehend ? ”

“ Quite, sir. And you really wish me to go ? ”

“ Yes. The others will do what I want to-day. Go to Alice, if you will. You understand.”

“ Oh yes,” said Deane in a low tone.

“ I have paved the way for you last night, Deane. You need have no fear. She is a girl in a thousand.”

Deane made no answer, but it seemed to him when he got into the street that the meshes of an intangible and very terrible net were being tightly fastened round him, and that, try as he would, he could not escape. The other Alice, too, in her youth, bravery, and courage, seemed to look at him with reproachful eyes. “ Are you giving me up for mere gold ? ” she seemed to say.

Deane pushed the thought out of sight, and



hurried to the Briary. He arrived there before eleven o'clock.

"Tell your mistress that I am going into the conservatory," he said to the servant who admitted him. He went straight there and stood close to the great plant of heliotrope. He disliked the smell, he disliked the luxurious and heated air, he disliked above all things that which he was about to do. There came a light sound, the rustling of a silk dress, a gracious presence in the place, and Alice, the colour in her cheeks and love in her eyes, stood before him.

"Stephen," she said.

She had called him "Stephen" for several years now, but to-day there was a new quality in her voice. He looked fully at her. His eyes were deep-set and grey in colour, they were resolute eyes that had long ago taken her heart captive. She trembled as she glanced at him, then she looked down.

"Give me your hand, Alice," said Stephen.

She gave it without hesitation. He felt it tremble; he put both of his round it, as though to imprison it; the little hand trembled more than ever.

"Alice," said Deane, "I am absolutely unworthy of you. You know why I have come here to-day. I can't say what I ought to say—I have no words, only that I am unworthy. Look well into your own heart, Alice, and tell me what you wish."

"What I wish?" she replied. She gave him one swift, half-frightened, upward glance, and then all in a minute her fortitude gave way. "You know my wishes, you know my heart."

"God help me," he murmured under his breath. Aloud he said, "Is it possible that one like you can care for one like me?"

"There are no words in any language to explain how deeply I love you," she said.

"Will you be my wife, Alice?" he asked then.

"If you really wish it, Stephen," she answered.

For reply he put his arm round her. He kissed her cheek, kissed her brow. She remained happy while he pressed her close to him, then he suddenly let her go and looked at her.

"You are a great match for me. All the



fellows in the City will envy me ; they will tell me that I played my cards well—have I, Alice—have I ? ”

“ Don’t talk like that,” she said. “ I come to you with those feelings which God gives a girl when she loves a man with all her heart and soul and strength. Stephen, I love you so deeply that I can scarcely expect you to love me as much in return. I am satisfied with a little less from you.”

“ You are an angel, fifty times too good for me,” he answered.

“ Had you not asked me to be your wife, I should never have married anyone,” she said. “ Come, let us walk up and down. I can scarcely realise what has happened.”

“ We will get away from that heliotrope,” he said, trying to repress a feeling of irritation which he had never experienced before in her presence.

They went to the other end of the conservatory. For the first time since the beginning of their friendship each was a little constrained to the other. Thoughts did not come so readily, or rather there were so many thoughts which had to be repressed.

Alice wanted to say all the time, "Do you remember that occasion or the other occasion? Do you remember how I looked then or what you said?" but for some inner reason the words remained unspoken. And Stephen all the time was also full of memories which must not be uttered, dreams which would now never be fulfilled, hopes which could not be realised. He was bound to Alice Langton, he liked her, but he did not love her. He hated himself for having drifted into this engagement, and yet with his whole heart he honoured and respected her.

"We must talk about Ursula," said Alice, after a pause. "I told father about her last night, he was very angry—he could not bear the thought of meeting her again. He is strangely obstinate, for dear, dear Ursula did nothing; but I, too, was determined—I said I would not give her up. So this morning he gave me leave to go and see her. Shall we go together, Stephen, and may I tell her that I am engaged to you, and that I am happy?"

"You also care more for love than gold,



little Alice," he said. He put his hand under her chin and looked into her face. "God grant I may be worthy of you," was his next remark.

Her eyes filled with tears.

"Shall we go to Ursula? I think Ursula will understand," she answered.

## CHAPTER XI.

STEPHEN DEANE became engaged to Alice Langton in December, and it was arranged that the wedding was to take place early in the following March. There was no reason for delay. The bride and bridegroom were to have their own private suite of rooms in the old house in Kensington. Mr. Langton was all too anxious to secure Deane as a son-in-law, and preparations for the wedding and for the bride's trousseau were going on all day long. It was to be a very great wedding, with all the *éclat* which immense wealth can confer. Alice's friends—and they belonged to many sorts and conditions of men—were to be present, and amongst others who were to grace the occasion, Herbert and little Mags were to make their appearance. Herbert was to be page, and Mags



sole bridesmaid at the wedding. This was Alice's own special desire, and her father, in spite of himself, had to give way.

"I won't have the mother," he said, "but if it makes all the difference between happiness and unhappiness, you can have the bairns, Alice. But why have only one bridesmaid? It will seem so extraordinary."

Alice laughed. Her cheeks bloomed now with the brightest roses, her eyes were like stars. People ceased to speak of Alice Langton as a tolerably good-looking girl, she was generally admitted to be a remarkably pretty one. Her happiness gave her fresh power—she began to assume quite a different position with her father; she absolutely forced him not only to allow the children to come to the wedding, but also to admit little Mags as the sole and only bridesmaid.

"I don't want any other," she said. "Were Ursula unmarried, she would be my bridesmaid. Dear, dear Ursula cannot even be present, but at least I shall have Mags. I never was one to make other girl friends, and to have a bridesmaid whom I do not care for is against my wishes."

“Have it your own way, my dear,” said Langton.

If Alice looked well, the same could scarcely be said of Oliver Langton. His business affairs were flourishing, the crisis had gone by, his credit in the City was excellent, he was as prosperous as any very crafty and very clever City man could be, nothing was said against his good name, his riches were supposed to be enormous. As to Deane, there was no post now considered too high for him to attain to. He might be anything he chose. Of course he would enter the House, and stand in the next election for his country. He might be knighted, he might receive a baronetcy. Langton did not care for these things for himself, but his son-in-law was different. Deane would soon hold a great position. Langton's idea was that after a time he himself might rest and put the lion's share of the business on the young man's shoulders.

The wedding drew near, it was only a week off. But there came a day when Langton found it impossible to rise from his pillow; his head ached, his brain was



confused. He admitted that he must have a touch of influenza ; he was undoubtedly feverish. The family doctor was summoned, who ordered the old man to stay indoors for a couple of days. Langton called Alice to his side.

“ I wish you'd telephone for Stephen. I want to speak to him,” he said.

Alice hurried off to obey ; Stephen replied that he would be round as soon as possible, and was himself standing by Langton's bedside in less than an hour after the message had reached him.

“ I can't get to the office to-day, Deane,” said the feverish old man, “ it's no end of a nuisance, for it is the day for the South African budget, and no doubt there will be all sorts of important telegrams with regard to those mines at Johannesburg. You must just run your eye over my correspondence, docket the letters carefully, and bring me a sort of synopsis of the most important news.”

Deane promised to do so, and hurried off to the office.

Langton lay back on his pillows with a

feeling of momentary relief. "That good fellow has a head on his shoulders," he said presently to Alice; "I can't tell you, Allie, what a real comfort it is to me that you are about to marry him. I shall miss you both during your honeymoon, so don't stay away longer than you can help."

Alice smiled in reply, sat down by Langton's side and began to talk to him upon those minor matters which she thought would really interest him.

Meanwhile Deane hurried back to the office. It was one of Langton's peculiarities always to read his correspondence, whether of a business nature or not, himself. He had never before trusted his letters to the perusal of anyone else, but Deane was not particularly impressed with this fact, as until lately his own work in the office had been quite apart from that undertaken by Langton. He said something now to the managing clerk.

"I shall be engaged in Mr. Langton's room for an hour, Phillips, but when I ring the bell you can send Walter in to take down my letters in shorthand."



Phillips replied by sincere hopes that Langton's illness was not serious.

"The governor hasn't been looking the thing for some time, Mr. Deane," he said; "since the day of the crisis, that we all looked for, before Christmas."

"What day of what crisis?" asked Deane.

"It has passed over us, sir, and you weren't supposed to be, so to speak, in the 'know' of the thing, but it was as close a shave as the firm ever ran. It told on the governor, sir, no doubt of that."

Deane was not the sort of man to encourage any further confidences, and Phillips went to attend to his own duties; Deane entered Langton's office, shut the door, seated himself at his future father-in-law's high desk, and drew the great sheaf of correspondence towards him. There were many letters and documents of the ordinary type, some of which were quite incomprehensible to the young man, others he slightly understood, a few he knew all about. Dividing the letters carefully into different sections, he proceeded to make rapid notes of the contents, and was just about to ring for

Walter, in order to reply to those quite within his grip to comprehend, when he observed a letter written on thin foreign paper, which had hitherto escaped his notice. He was divided between the desire to take this letter back unopened to Langton and a curious wish to burn it unread. He could not account for his own sensations. Finally he called himself silly for attaching any importance to the letter, which was probably one of the ordinary business type. He would read it, of course. Why worry Langton over the matter? He could tell him what it contained when he spoke of the rest of the correspondence. He accordingly opened the little foreign envelope, and took out a fairly closely written sheet of paper. On this he read the following words—

“DEAR SIR,—When my friend, Jack Hal-yard, died, he confided his secret to me. He described you, sir, for what you are—as quite the most honourable gentleman in England, and told me the enormous nature of the trust which he reposed in you. But he said something else—he said if ever I



had the chance of coming to England I should call and see you and perhaps you would introduce me to the young lady whom he spoke of as 'Ursula,' and to whom he left his fortune. The poor chap was so taken up with thoughts of her and her mother before her as to make it almost piteous to listen to him. His one desire, as he breathed his last, was that she should know how he had toiled for her and hers, and how happy the thought of all that this money might do for her in the future made him on his death-bed. I could not help wondering to myself at his leaving such a big fortune as £60,000 to you, sir, so to speak, without one clause to testify that it was only yours in trust for another, but it was his wish, and he said that you were the most honourable man he ever met. I would not write to you now but for the fact that Jack wished me to see 'his Ursula,' as he called her, should I come to England. At the time of his death I had as little thought as he had, poor fellow, of ever visiting again our native land, but since then I am anxious to see an old friend of mine who is taken ill—

he has broken down, in fact, after years of hard work. So I am starting to England by the mail packet which sails after the one which brings this letter, and will walk into your office, most likely, a week after you receive this. Trusting you are well, sir,

“ I remain,

“ Yours respectfully,

“ WILLIAM KEYES.”



## CHAPTER XII.

HAVING read this letter once, Deane felt a curious sense of shame steal over him. He knew that unwittingly he had stumbled across a private matter—something quite unconnected with Langton's ordinary business. He thrust it into his pocket, meaning to take it straight to Langton and to give it to him without comment. Having done this, he carefully attended to what was to be done in the office and then returned to the Briary. His wish was to forget the letter, but in spite of these desires on his part, the words which Keyes had used returned again and again to his memory. He could not tell why he was distressed, nor why he had a moral certainty that the letter would probably distress Langton.

When he got to the house, he was met

by Alice. He was very fond of Alice. Each day as it passed lessened those feelings of dislike at the thought of marrying her. The other Alice's memory—the Alice with the earnest eyes and firm but pathetic mouth—seemed to be fading into immeasurable distance. He thought that, during their honeymoon, he might talk to Alice, who would then be his wife, about the girl who had won his passionate admiration a couple of years before. They would help her together, they would encourage her valiant efforts. She, as well as Ursula Sherwood, would share the rich and full harmony of their mutual loves. Yes, in their case money should be a means—a grand power for good.

Alice now went up to her lover with smiling lips.

“How long you have been,” she said. “I expected you an hour ago. Shoolbred has sent that bale of tapestry and also some patterns for the drawing-room curtains. I want you to look at them.”

“Presently, dear,” he answered. “You didn't know, perhaps, Alice, that I arrived



quite early this morning and had a talk with your father."

"Oh, yes," said Alice; "father told me. He sent you to the City to read his letters. I trust everything is right—he is in a very queer and irritable mood."

Deane thought of the letter, which even now pressed against his heart.

"I will see him, if you don't mind," he said.

"Yes, of course," she replied. "You will find him up; he has disobeyed the doctor and gone downstairs. He is in his sanctum. He ought to have stayed in bed, for his temperature is above normal."

"All right," said Deane, "I will go to him, and then come to you in the drawing-room."

He did not kiss her, he did not even touch her hand. Nevertheless, her words were pleasant to him—her look was pleasant. He thought that he would be a very happy man with Alice as his companion.

"She is so sensible," was his reflection now. "She is very wise in her generation; she expects very little. Yes, I can give her

a very true love—God helping me, I will try to be as good a husband to her as she deserves.”

He entered his father-in-law's presence. Langton was seated in the old arm-chair.

“Well, Deane,” he said, “what a time you have been.”

“There were a good many letters, sir.”

“Anything of special importance?” asked Langton.

“Those shares in South American stock are going up, Mr. Langton. I gave directions to sell at——”

Deane plunged into business particulars. Langton nodded; his eyes shone with pleasure.

“You will gain a few thousands on that transaction,” said Deane.

“Why do you say *I* shall gain?” answered Langton. “It is a mutual affair from this out, my boy. You understand, don't you?”

“Yes,” said Deane.

He described still further the contents of the correspondence and the steps he had taken to reply to them. Langton leaned back in his chair with a sigh of relief.



"You have a capital head for business, Stephen," he said.

"As a matter of fact," said Stephen, "I never took very kindly to business until it was, so to speak, forced on me. My wishes lay in the direction of one of the professions."

Langton was silent. Deane also remained without speaking for a minute. Then he said with a slight hesitancy, which alone arrested Langton's attention—

"You told me to open all letters?"

"Certainly, I have no secrets from you."

"So I understood—therefore I obeyed."

"What does this mean, Deane?"

"I have a letter here which is, as far as I am concerned, a secret. I don't fathom it—I suppose you will. It's from a fellow called Keyes."

"Never heard of him," said Langton.

"A begging letter, doubtless. They don't often come to the firm, but occasionally a man is audacious enough——"

"This is not a begging letter. It evidently has an explanation and will be plain to you, sir. It comes from Auckland."

At these words a swift change came over Langton's face. Deane was startled.

"Are you ill, sir?"

"Give me the letter," was Langton's reply.

Deane did so. Langton tore it from its envelope and buried himself in the contents. Deane could not bear to look at his face, and yet he did not like to leave him. He walked to the window and looked down into the conservatory. It was gayer than ever with brilliant blossom. Deane felt that he hated all the colour, all the wealth which this place testified. All of a sudden he heard something which caused him to turn. Langton was standing up. His face was almost purple. He came up to Deane and clutched him by the shoulder.

"You read this?"

"Yes," answered the young man.

Langton's hold on his shoulder became so tense as to cause him pain.

"You have your—suspicions?"

"No, sir," said Deane. "I know nothing about the letter nor its object."

"It alludes to a person called Ursula."



A flash of light came over the young man's face.

"I am very sorry I read the letter," he said, "The fact is, I was interested, and finished it before I quite knew what I was doing."

"There is nothing for you to be sorry about, Deane," said Langton. He released his hold as suddenly as he had gripped the young man. Deane fell back almost a foot with a sort of recoil.

"To tell you the truth," continued Langton, speaking very rapidly, "this letter is from a tiresome fellow who wants to blackmail me—I will see him when he comes along. You think the name 'Ursula' has something to do with Mrs. Sherwood. You're mistaken, that's all. Forget all about the matter, my dear sir."

"I suppose I ought to congratulate you upon the money part," said Deane.

Langton laughed.

"It's the money part that's the real hoax," he said. "Do you suppose I should really be left a sum of money intended for another person without giving it to that person?"

"No, sir, certainly not."

"Whatever I am, I am not a rogue," said Langton.

"You're the most straightforward man of business I have ever come across," was Deane's response.

"And," continued Langton, not noticing this remark, "had I been left money, is it likely I should not have told you and my daughter? Forget this letter, Deane—its coming into your hands has annoyed me inexpressibly. Trust to me, however, to arrange matters with Keyes; he will meet his match in me, I'm not going to be—be fooled so easily."

"Of course not, sir," said Deane.

Langton returned to his seat, muttering indistinct words under his breath. By and by Deane left the room. He had tried to soothe the old man, but he felt the reverse of comfortable. Langton's words were not reassuring. In fact, they had not blinded him in the least.

"He has a story that he wants to conceal," thought Deane. "But what it really means is beyond my power to fathom. He



is afraid of Keyes, whoever Keyes may be. Why should he grip me as he did by the shoulder if something had not upset him? Why did he turn so white when I said that the letter was from Auckland? Well, after all, I suppose that I must forget all about it. I can't for the life of me comprehend what it means. He won't talk of it again. I sincerely trust that Keyes, whoever Keyes is, will have got his 'quietus' before Alice and I return from our honeymoon."

"Stephen!" called Alice's voice.

She was standing by the open drawing-room door. She took his hand and led him in.

"What a time you have been," she said, "and how white you look."

"I have a slight headache, Alice. It will pass, dear."

"You have complained of headache once or twice lately," she answered.

She looked at him earnestly, then she said—

"How is father?"

"I don't think he is quite well. The fact is, money is not all bliss, Alice. Your

father is more or less feverish because he cannot be at his office to-day."

"And yet," said Alice, "he has far more money than he knows what to do with. I wish," she added, "that money and father were not such close friends. Oh, Stephen—I must go to No. 11, Asprey Gardens, to see little Mags in her bridesmaid's dress!"

"I am sorry that I cannot go with you," answered Stephen. He knew there was no special reason why he should not gratify Alice. He was fond of the children, too, and he liked Ursula, as all men did who in the least understood her.

Alice gave him a look of some disappointment, but then she cheered up and said, "All the same, I know I ought to go. You will come in this evening, won't you?"

"Yes," he answered. He hardly kissed her, hardly waited to say good-bye, but hurried from the house. He wanted to be alone and to think. The letter he had read a couple of hours back had not made him half so surprised or half so uneasy as Mr. Langton's manner of receiving it. There was not the slightest doubt that the old



merchant had got a severe shock, and pluckily as he had tried to recover his balance he could not conceal his moods from Deane's sharp and practical young eyes. "His first idea," continued Deane, following out a certain argument in his own mind, "was that my thoughts would fly to Mrs. Sherwood. He has denied that the letter has anything to do with her; he declares that the whole thing is a hoax. I suppose I must banish it from my mind."

He went back to the office, but thoughts are not easily banished, and although he had certain matters to attend to he only gave them a divided attention. That evening he went back to Alice, but found her looking anxious and troubled.

"I wonder," she said, "if we shall be really married in a week's time."

"Why do you doubt it, dear?" he answered. "All things are in preparation—there is nothing left undone."

"I have a sort of fear about it," she replied, "which sometimes comes when you long most intensely, most passionately, for a moment that is to be the greatest moment

in your existence. That is what I feel about this marriage—it is all my world—it means the consummation of my greatest bliss.”

He took her hand. He felt her slight, white fingers close round his, he felt them trembling slightly. He wondered why he did not take her in his arms, press her close to his heart, and murmur words of rapture at the thought of being with her. He felt he was by no means absolutely unhappy, yet neither was there a sense of joy in the thought of that event which now loomed so near.

“Stephen, how quiet you are,” said Alice. “I suppose it is good for me to marry a man like you, and yet when first I got to know you I used to think that our natures were quite the reverse of what I now find them to be. You were active, impulsive, generous, outspoken—I, it is true, was always outspoken, but I was calm and took life quietly; I was the reverse of Ursula.”

“We never can possibly know what the true self of another person is until we know that person well, very well,” said Deane.



"But, Alice, I am not really the very quiet man you take me for. My heart often beats with most strong emotions, only it is my nature to keep them as much subdued as possible."

She longed to ask him if any of these emotions were stirred in his heart on her account, but did not dare. He felt that they were near a perilous topic, and hastily turned the conversation.

"Tell me about Mrs. Sherwood. How is Mags? Does she believe that the white fairy has given her the bridesmaid's dress?"

"Mags, as usual, was enchanting. It was Herbert who was grave."

"Ah," said Deane, "he is a dear little chap—I admire him immensely."

"He is a boy in a thousand," said Alice. "He thinks the world of his mother; I never saw anything like it."

"Perhaps you would also say that his mother is one in a thousand," said Deane.

"So she is. Do you know, on the whole I had a painful visit? Ursula is great—as great as you are—at concealing emotions, but the difference between you lies in this,

that you can have no very urgent emotions at the present time to conceal, whereas she has."

"I don't quite understand," he replied. "Why do you say so?"

"I am certain of it. It was partly Herbert who opened my eyes, and partly Maurice Sherwood."

"Ah!—I have never happened to meet the husband."

"You shall often see him after we are married. He and Ursula must visit me in our part of the house; I shall not allow anything else. My father has power over his portion of the Briary, but the new rooms where you and I will live will be open to Ursula and her husband."

"Very good, my Alice. And you think I shall like him?"

"I know it; he is wonderful. Not that he talks much, he is very quiet, even quieter than you."

"Does he look well? He was ill at that crucial time when we acted as the white fairy for the children."

"He says he is well, but I doubt it,"



said Alice. "He is very thin and very white."

"What does he do?"

"He used to be editor of a weekly paper—I forget the name, I think Ursula mentioned it once. But he lost that post owing to his illness."

"Then how do they live?"

"I don't know, Stephen," said Alice, dropping her voice, "and I am afraid to ask."

"I should not have thought you would have been afraid, and it is important to know. People of the type of your Cousin Ursula will almost die rather than reveal their real necessities."

"That is one reason why I want our wedding to be soon, as soon as possible," said Alice, "for afterwards I can and will speak out, for I can and will help."

"I see," answered Stephen.

"You will let me, of course, dearest?" said Alice.

"Let you, dear Alice?" he replied. "I shall never be able to forget that the bulk of the money is yours."

"You must forget," she replied; "I shall insist. The money is both. When God has made us one we are one in truth, money and all."

He gave her hand the slightest possible squeeze, and then dropped it.

"I do feel uneasy to-day," she continued. "He looked so bad, and yet made efforts to appear well. She looked so bad, and yet made such efforts to appear cheerful, and there was little Herbert watching them both with, oh! such an unchildlike look on his darling face; and there was Mags, in irrepressible spirits and whispering loudly, so loudly that all might hear, to her mother one minute, and then to her father, 'that the white fairy was quite certain to send plenty more monish before long, for she had asked her. It was,' said Mags, 'Herbert and me. We went to the Gardens and we sat on the same bench, and we spoke to white fairy, and we said that muzzer wants monish to pay bills, and so does fazer, so the monish is safe to come.' Poor Ursula turned very white when Mags spoke, but her father took her on his knee and whispered some-



thing to her, and she became silent and looked into his face. I felt, Stephen, afterwards, as though I could scarcely swallow my tea, and when I went away it was the most difficult thing in all the world not to press my purse into Ursula's hand, but I did not dare to do it. I did, however, ask her one question. I said, 'Does not your husband want more employment now that he has lost his post as editor of that special weekly? Does he not want another?' "

Stephen sat very still for a time.

After a pause, he said—

"The difficulty about your cousin and her husband will really be this, how to get them to take help from us at all?"

"I know it, but I will speak out to Ursula when father and I have our separate establishments. I cannot do it before."

"It is very odd," said Stephen, his thoughts flashing back to the queer letter, "it is very odd indeed why your father should be so obdurate against your cousin. She has practically done little to offend him."

"I know, but he is so angry on that one

subject, so terribly severe, so unjust, that I can scarcely bring myself to allude to it."

"Had he always that kind of flaw in his character, Alice?"

"He has never been like that to anyone else. I think at one time he must have loved her very much, and thus was more deeply hurt when she refused to do what he wanted."

Stephen made no answer to this, but, after a time, he said—

"Now suppose that you and I were to have a little venture on our own account."

"What?"

"You are fond of literature, are you not?"

"I don't think so. I mean I am only just ordinarily fond of it."

"Well, I think that scarcely matters. The thing must be regarded in the light of an investment. Suppose we start a weekly paper and make Maurice Sherwood editor?"

"Stephen!" said Alice, springing to her feet, "you are a genius. Whatever made such a thought come into your head!"



“It will cost a good bit of money, but we can, I think, manage that—I mean that I think *I* can manage it,” said Stephen. “You know that I have £50,000 of my own. It is invested in the business, but your father could not possibly object to my drawing £5,000 or £6,000 out at once. We could, even before our honeymoon, begin the new editor’s salary. If he has been sub-editor to another paper for long years he could help us by going round to agents and looking up advertisements, and also discussing print and paper with printers and paper-makers, etc.; also the best and cheapest way of producing the paper. We would thus have a considerable amount of correspondence with authors and editors. I think we would be justified in giving him his salary quite three months before the paper was started.”

“The idea is quite magnificent,” said Alice. “Oh, Stephen, I always cared for you, but now I am so struck with admiration for your talent that I almost fear it is too good news that we should ever be married!”

“Nonsense, child,” he replied, cheered by her words. “But if you really approve of it, Alice,” he continued, “we will do it, and I will go round to-morrow and speak to Sherwood. I shall not mind having a talk with him if I have something definite to offer. The very first thing, of course, is to get the money. I think that, with his knowledge, with £5,000 we might start a small weekly paper.”

“Oh, of course we might,” she said; “and several weekly papers for that matter.” She had not the faintest idea how the business was managed.

“Very well,” said Stephen. “I will go and talk to your father to-night if I can; if not, to-morrow.”

“I will go to father and find out if he can see you to-night. He was not at all well all the afternoon, and I had to send for the doctor; he ordered him back to bed. He was exceedingly angry with me about his getting up to-day, but perhaps he is better now. Of course you can draw your own money out of the firm—of course you can, Stephen.”



"Of course," he replied; "that cannot be the slightest difficulty."

"I will go and speak to father; but, first of all, tell me what salary you think you ought to give Mr. Sherwood?"

"It would be absurd to overpay him," said Stephen, "and from what you tell me, he is the sort of man who would resent anything of the kind. I will delay the subject of the salary until I have questioned one or two editors in town, but I can let you know to-morrow night."

"He must be paid well, I shall insist on it," said Alice; "£1,000 a year at least."

"Nonsense, child," he replied.

"I insist on £1,000 a year," she repeated.

He smiled at her. She left the room. In a few minutes she came back; her face was overcast.

"Father is not at all well. I am terribly sorry to have to tell you that you cannot see him to-night. His temperature is quite high; and, do you know, I don't think he could realise what he was talking about when I came into the room. He was

murmuring the name of Ursula. Now it is impossible that he can care enough about Ursula to talk of her when he is partly delirious."

"Oh, you cannot tell," said Stephen. "People when they are feverish often revert to bygone days in their thoughts. Well, Alice, I won't stay now. I will look up the subject of the paper and make one or two enquiries to-morrow, and send round the first thing to see how your father is. Don't be anxious, dear, it is just that tiresome influenza taking its course, and, as you say, he ought not to have got up to-day."



## CHAPTER XIII.

THE next morning Langton was less feverish. The doctor came and said that the severe attack was yielding to treatment, but he ordered the old man to remain in bed all day and to be kept as quiet and as free from excitement as possible. Alice telephoned the good news to Stephen. He busied himself, therefore, during the greater part of the morning and afternoon in looking up different matters with regard to the weekly paper, which he had now quite made up his mind to start out of his own private funds. Having been told by more than one City editor that £5,000 was altogether too small an amount to float his paper advantageously, he determined to withdraw £10,000 from his father-in-law's business, to re-invest it for a time on his own account,

and to draw from it as the paper required the money.

When he arrived at Langton's house the following evening he was full of information for Alice. All was going swimmingly, everything, of course, depended on an editor. Sherwood was known to have taken a very able part in the editorship of the *Social World*. The men in question could not understand why such a first-rate fellow had lost his post through mere illness, and congratulated Stephen Deane on his luck in having practically secured a man like Sherwood to conduct his own paper. "He is original, he does not overdo the thing," they said. "He loves subjects of deep thought; he has the critical faculty to a delightful extent, and can also discern the merits of a short story. In short, he is the very man for your purpose." All this praise was nectar and ambrosia to Alice.

"And did you ask about the salary?" she said.

"Well, dear, I am afraid you will be a little disappointed. Papers of the sort which I intend to produce must be made to pay—



that is the first consideration—and large salaries to editors and sub-editors and the usual staff swallow up an immense proportion of the profits. Of course, if the paper became at once popular and ran to large numbers, I could increase Sherwood's salary, and would do so almost immediately; but my proposal now is that he accepts the editorship for at least six months on £400 a year and has a share of whatever profits we receive. Thus, if the paper fails, he fails; if it succeeds, he prospers."

"But that is so terribly businesslike and so unfriendly," objected Alice. Then she added, "Surely, Stephen, you must guess that £400 would go a very little way in keeping this house. You could not——"

"But the Briary is not in any one respect to be compared with Asprey Gardens," replied Stephen. "I know, Alice," he continued, "that I am in the right of it, and I believe that a certain £400 a year, with other payments to be made on a scale to be determined on for his own writings, and a share in the profits, will seem very fair remuneration to Sherwood. I think, dear,

you ought to allow me to judge in this matter."

She felt that he was right, although her longing was to at least double the amount of the salary.

"But I can do nothing," continued Stephen, "until I have had a word with your father. Will he speak with me to-night?"

"The doctor has forbidden him to see anyone. Perhaps you can call early to-morrow."

"I shall be very busy to-morrow, and I ought not to delay an hour in having an interview with Sherwood."

"But why should you delay, Stephen? There is no need. You are doing it, darling, out of your own private fortune, and whatever my father may or may not say on the subject it cannot alter your intention."

"Certainly not, Alice. This is—let me see—Thursday; we are to be married next Tuesday. There is very little time to lose: I will call on Sherwood to-morrow. I should have liked best to have been able to draw the money from the firm before I said a



word to him on the subject, but that, of course, is all right."

"All right!" cried Alice. "Why, of course it is—how could it be anything else? The money is yours, you have lent it to father for the present, but he will give it you back the moment you speak to him on the subject."

"Of course he will, dear."

They talked a little longer, and then Stephen went away, with the intention of calling on Sherwood the following day. He did call, as a matter of fact, at Asprey Gardens between eleven and twelve o'clock. Mags, Herbert, and the baby had just gone off with Jane, of the squint eye, to Kensington Gardens. Herbert looked very pale as he left the house, Mags still, however, wore her dimples, but her dimples were not in as constant play as they used to be. The white fairy was behaving very badly. No "monish" was coming to poor muzzer and the bills were coming in, and coming in, in a way that was disgraceful, so thought Mags. "You ought to be 'shamed of yourself, fairy," Mags would cry aloud, with

childish impotence, "you is so cosy and so comfortable, you don't fink not one bit of poor muzzer. See and get the monish to-day, fairy, or I will be 'shamed of you."

Mags therefore trotted off to the Gardens with immense determination revealing itself all over her sturdy little form. As to Herbert, he scarcely spoke at all as they entered those magical grounds, for his faith, notwithstanding the beautiful Christmas time, was sadly shaken.

How little these two children guessed as they sat side by side on the very same bench where they had once sat together and spoken of their Christmas longings that the very same white fairy, with just the same kindness of heart, was approaching their house, had mounted the steps, had rung the front door bell, and that the front door was opened to this wondrous fairy by no less a person than "muzzer" herself. "Muzzer" said, "Come in" to the fairy, and the fairy, in the shape of Stephen Deane, bent his tall head and entered the little house. He was conducted straight



to "fazer" and thereupon the following conversation ensued—

"Mr. Sherwood," said Stephen Deane, "I am a very busy man, and I am about—as perhaps you know—to be married to Miss Langton on Tuesday next."

"I know that, sir," replied Sherwood, looking with kindly eyes full at his visitor.

"I have a great scheme in my head, Mr. Sherwood, and am anxious to know if you can assist me."

"Anything in my power," said Sherwood. "Come here, Ursula," he added, for his wife had come into the room, and seeing that they were both talking was about to withdraw. "Can you, dear," he said, "give us a few minutes of your attention?"

"Yes, please do, Mrs. Sherwood," said Deane. "I am convinced that you are immensely clever and can help me in this matter."

"If I can I shall be delighted," said Ursula.

She sank into the nearest chair, and thus the white fairy, according to the children,

was in touch with both "fazer" and "muzzer."

Deane then began to reveal his scheme.

"I want to invest a certain sum of money in a weekly paper," he said. "I want it to be good, not trashy, mind you; a little above the average, but in no sense above the people; religious, without being sectarian, aiming after the best in the hearts of all its readers; I want it to be printed on good paper; and I want, if possible, to have a few illustrations. I don't wish the paper to contain, in any sense of the word, trash; and I also want it to pay. A losing paper, from a commercial point of view, does good to no one. Now, Mr. Sherwood, I am told that you sub-edited for several years a very ably conducted paper called the *Social World*."

"That is indeed true," said Ursula; "and what is more," she added, "my husband did not only sub-edit it, but practically edited the paper."

"So much the better for me," said Deane, "for, in the present case, my hopes are strongly fixed on you, Sherwood, as the



future editor of that paper which at present is non-existent. It lies in my brain, however, and I want you to be the living genius who will bring it into the light of day. Will you, all else being agreeable, accept the editorship ? ”

“ If it is a *bonâ fide* investment and not an idea of yours to help me because I need help, I will edit it with all the heart that is in me,” said Sherwood, “ but ”—he turned and glanced at his wife—“ I must be quite sure on that point.”

“ And I will answer in as sincere a spirit as that in which you have spoken,” said Deane. “ I cannot pretend that the idea did not come into my mind when Alice Langton and I were talking about you and your wife, but since then I have most earnestly wished to possess such a paper on my own account, and the money to be floated will be my affair, not my wife’s affair, and will have nothing whatever to do with old Oliver Langton.”

“ Then, in that case, Maurice,” said his wife—she stood up, her face was white as death.

“Sir, I thank you for a very plain answer,” said Sherwood, “and if, after making very careful enquiries, you still wish to produce such a paper, I will be your editor and will do my best to serve you faithfully.”

After this the conversation flowed evenly. Ursula got up and left the room. She went up to her own room and remained there some time, and came out of it with red eyes. But still Deane and Sherwood talked on.

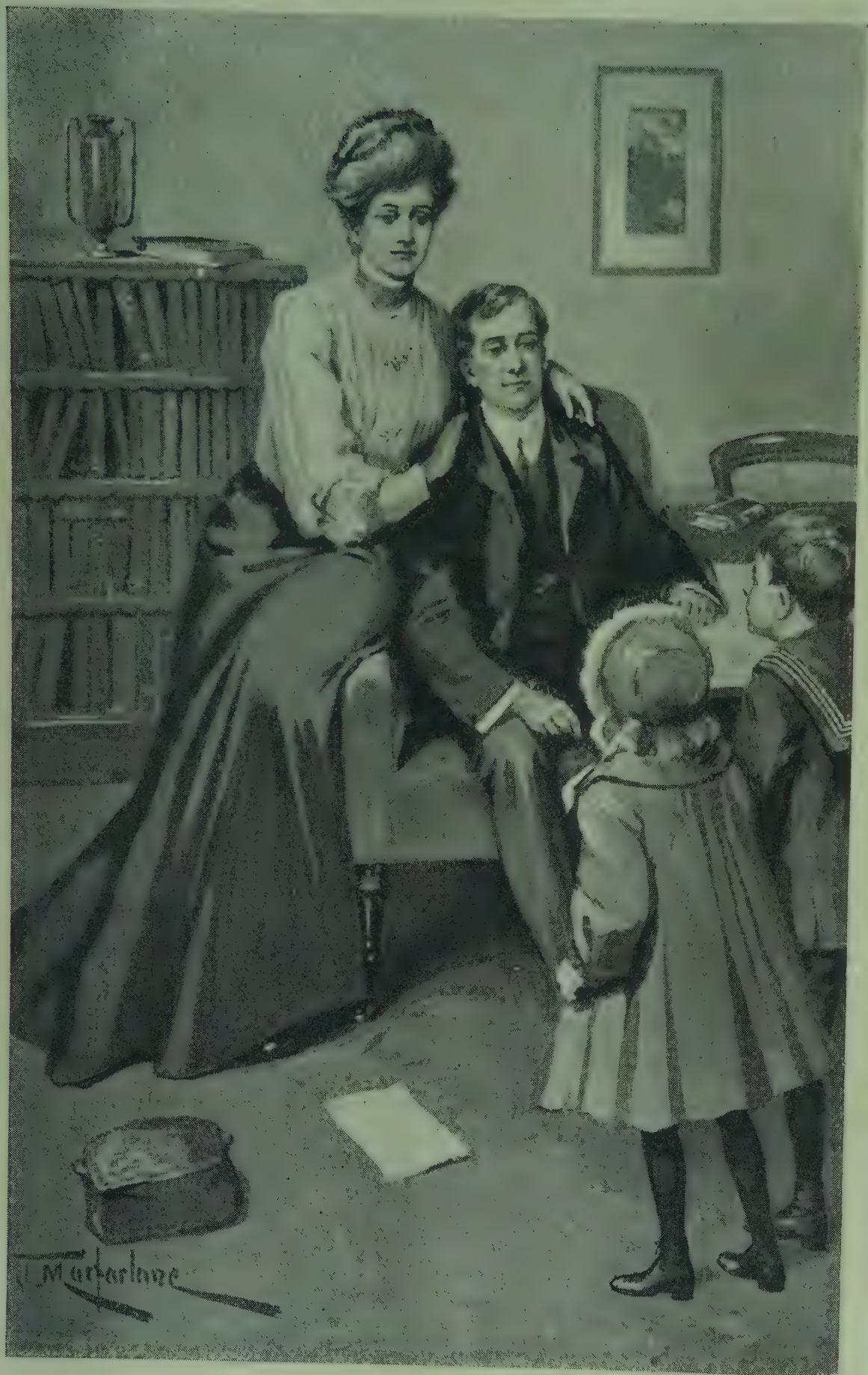
By and by Deane departed, then Sherwood called his wife.

“He offers £400 a year, and he will pay me at whatever the usual rate is for whatever contributions I like to put into the paper, and if there is a profit, the good fellow says that I am to have one quarter of it. Think of it—could you ever imagine anything more generous?”

Ursula put her arms round her husband's neck and burst out crying. It was at this moment that little voices were heard in the hall. Mags put in an eager and quivering face.

“Well,” she said, “well—has it come?—has it come, muzzer—has it come?”





“ ‘Well,’ she said, ‘has it come, muzzer—has it come?’ ”





"It's coming, my darling," said Ursula. She dropped on her knees and received the child in her arms.

"Dere, Herbert, didn't I tell 'oo?" said Mags. "Dere is white fairies."

"There are some very beautiful fairies in the world," said the father, and he kissed both children. After a time, he said slowly—

"I want to imagine a very great story, and I want to put it into a paper that is yet unborn, and I want to describe in it a little girl called Mags and a little boy called Herbert."

"And a muzzer called Ursula," almost screamed Mags.

"Yes, and a mother and wife called Ursula."

"And a fazer, don't forget the fazer," shouted Mags again.

"Yes, a father too; but now run away to the nursery, for I want to begin this wonderful story this very instant minute. For the paper is coming into existence soon and this story must be written."

## CHAPTER XIV.

“FATHER,” said Alice, “Stephen must see you to-night.”

Old Langton was seated huddled up in his old chair. The deep armchair which he invariably loved to sit in had been removed from the sanctum sanctorum to the greater privacy of his bedroom. A very bright fire burned in the grate. The grate was old-fashioned, the room itself also belonged to a bygone period. Langton was a man of very curious idiosyncrasies. He was rich—or was considered rich—beyond the dreams of avarice. But though he longed to collect gold until it became the consuming and master passion of his life, he was by no means fond of luxury for himself. He wished to surround Alice with it, but he liked plain old-fashioned rooms. The



bedroom he chose to occupy at the Briary belonged to the ancient house. It had a low ceiling and a somewhat uneven floor. The furniture had been his mother's. She had breathed her last in the four-poster bedstead. She had looked at her face in this queer oval-shaped looking-glass. She had kept her simple wardrobe in that oak press in one corner, and had tidily and neatly arranged her smaller possessions in the chest of drawers, which was almost worm-eaten. Not for all you could give him would Langton have changed one scrap of the furniture of this room.

After his mother died, he and his wife had occupied this special chamber. It was plain, with a studied plainness which almost touched on the austere. The chairs were of old deal, with hard seats. The carpet on the floor was a mere rug, and very thread-bare at that; it lay in the centre of the room. It was necessary, therefore, in case of illness, to convey the old man's comfortable chair from another part of the house.

He was resting in it now when Alice came

in. His face was puckered with innumerable lines ; his eyes were partly shut ; there was a beard of a week's growth on his chin. His rugged eyebrows were lowered over his partly shut eyes. He roused himself when his daughter spoke, and looked her all over. Had anyone been there to see, that person must have remarked that Langton and Alice belonged to different epochs. One represented the dainty and luxurious living of the present day, the other was a monument of the more rigorous past ; and yet, in both their veins ran the same blood, and Langton excused himself for those circumstances in his career which were not, even to his conscience, justified by the plea that his love for Alice was the worthy motive.

“ You must see Stephen,” said the daughter now.

“ And why must I see him ? ” he answered.

“ He has a particular matter to talk over.”

Alice knelt by her father's side. He half raised his very wrinkled hand to smooth her cheek, but dropped it again as though the effort were too much.



"What's the day of the week, Allie?"

"Thursday night, father."

"And when is the wedding, child?"

"Next Tuesday."

"Let him wait till after the wedding."

"But, father—that is just it—he can't; he has a matter of business to talk over with you. It won't occupy either of you more than a few minutes. You are much better, much better, are you not, darling?"

"I'd be better if I were not worried to death," said Langton. "That's it—worried to death. Why will people not see that a sick man ought not to be interfered with—that business affairs ought to lie in abeyance until health returns? I don't want to see Stephen, particularly if his conversation will be on business."

"Still, father, I most earnestly beg of you to do it."

There was something in her tone which caused Langton to rouse himself.

"What's the matter?" he said.

He spoke quickly, as though an all-abiding fear was roused into sudden prominence.

“Has he—Stephen—suspicions?” asked the old merchant, tumbling out the words.

“Is he beginninng—to—doubt?”

“Father, what *do* you mean?”

Langton saw that he had revealed too much—that his intense anxiety was unfounded.

“Forgive me, child,” he said. “I sometimes imagine that all men are my enemies. Alice, the man of money is not to be envied; he is hated by his fellows; all the poorer fry loathe him. They accuse him of unjust dealings. The fact is, they are consumed with jealousy of his success.”

“Father, I do not believe you, and, indeed, you mistake about Stephen. What could he suspect you of, dear? Of course,” she added truthfully, “both he and I are naturally pained at your attitude towards Ursula.”

“Yes, yes,” said Langton. “You think of nothing but that most ungrateful woman.”

“We think of other things, but we also think of her.”

“Well, child, we won’t talk of her now. With regard to your cousin Ursula, I have



made my stand and I mean to abide by it. Stephen is a good chap, and I am glad he is to be my son-in-law. Send him to me at once, but tell him that I can't give him more than five minutes."

Alice stooped, pressed a light kiss on her father's forehead and left the room. When he found himself alone, old Langton stared round him.

"My word," he said to himself, "I do wish that uncanny feeling that there are ghosts about would leave me. An hour ago I could have sworn that my mother stood by the door of the old wardrobe. She seemed to look at me from an immeasurable distance, and yet was at the same time quite close. She had a shadowy hand on the lock and was about to open the door. There was a look in her eyes which—my God!—it nearly turned me sick."

Langton covered his face with both hands:

"I got a fright," he said to himself a minute later, "when Alice was so persistent. But Stephen is a good boy, and above suspicion. It was lucky, after all, that the letter fell into his hands. He brought it

to me, and it no longer exists. Stephen is that mild, straight order of being that doesn't even see wickedness, he can be easily cajoled. Keyes will be a different man to manage. Thank Heaven! he can't possibly arrive until the day after the wedding. Whatever he does, I sha'n't mind so much if Alice is safe. Once Alice is happily married, I can stand anything else. It is only to manage Keyes—I have no doubt I can do that; there are several modes—oh, yes—and I—I am not *over* scrupulous. Good God! is that my mother again?—no, that is Stephen's step."

"Well, sir," cried Stephen Deane, "I am glad to see you; you look miles better, you are—I mean——"

"Don't be a humbug, Deane," said old Langton. "Take that chair; the room doesn't contain an easier one except this, and I am not disposed to resign this in your favour. As to looking better, you tell a lie when you utter such words. Look at me, and say that again if you dare!"

Stephen was standing up; his eyes rested on the pinched face, the shaggy brows, the



hard lips, the growth of hair on cheeks and chin.

"You've had a sharp turn," he said. "I could not realise that a few days' illness would make such a difference."

"I was uncommonly near shuffling off," said old Langton. "The doctor was alarmed—told me so, but Alice didn't know. I could have gone if I'd wished to—it was but to let go. There were times the night before last when I thought I would let go; but Alice kept me back. I am all right now, the danger is past. Wish that shadow would leave me, though."

He glanced half over his shoulder in the direction of the wardrobe.

"What shadow, sir?"

"Hush! hush!—nothing—nothing at all—a weak old man's weak fancy. Don't you repeat anything to alarm Alice. I want the wedding to be on Tuesday—I'll be quite right by Tuesday."

"Do you think you'll be well enough, sir?"

"I tell you I know my own feelings. We'll have a merry crowd here, and Alice

shall go away in all her splendour. The account of the wedding shall be in all the fashion papers. Has Alice sent photographs of you both to the *Lady's Pictorial*, the *Woman at Home*, and the other magazines that describe those couples who approach Hymen's altar?"

"I don't know, sir," answered Stephen.

"You don't know," repeated Langton, in a tone of irritation; "and what's more, I don't believe you care."

"I don't, Mr. Langton. These things are nothing at all to me."

"Nothing at all?" said the merchant.  
"Is money nothing at all?"

"Oh, sir, yes—it is a power. By the way, I have just come to talk to you on that matter."

"Haven't you enough, young man? I am sure I gave Alice sufficient to supply the needs of any woman who was not wickedly extravagant."

"This has nothing to do with Alice," said Deane.

"Are your interests paid you regularly?" was Langton's question.



“Yes, thank you, sir—at least, there is a quarter owing; but that is not the immediate question.”

“Then confound it, sir! what is the immediate question?” asked Langton, starting almost to his feet and glancing again towards the wardrobe. “What is it—you, young sir? what brings you to disturb a man who is ill?”

“I am very sorry; but, Mr. Langton, you disturb yourself unnecessarily. I simply want you to write instructions to your brokers to pay me back from my own money ten thousand pounds.”

“Ten thousand what?” almost shouted Langton.

“I want,” continued Deane, very calmly, “ten thousand pounds to be in my possession before my marriage. I am about to do a little speculation on my own account. This is quite independent of you or of Alice. I want the money—the capital, I mean. You remember telling me at the time when I lent you my fifty thousand that I could draw at twenty-four hours’ notice any sum that I required. Well,

I want ten thousand pounds by Saturday morning. Will you kindly write to your brokers ? ”

“ Will I kindly write to my brokers ? ” said Langton.

He sank back into his chair. There was cold dew on his forehead. Rich as he believed himself to be, he could not at that moment draw safely from his capital half the sum that Stephen required.

“ What is the matter, sir ? ” asked Stephen.

“ I—I cannot do it—that is the fact, my boy.”

“ You can’t let me have some of my own money ? ” said Stephen, in real astonishment and intense apprehension.

“ No—not a *sou*, at present.”

“ But what *does* this mean, Mr. Langton ? ”

“ It is invested—well invested—can’t be touched for a bit.”

“ But,” said the young man, thinking with dismay of Sherwood and the hopes he had himself excited, “ this is outside the trust. I am, in fact, pledged to supply



this capital. I want it, Mr. Langton—I must have it.”

“You can go to blazes, if you like!” said Langton. “You can’t have it—not a *sou* of it.”

“Until when, sir?”

“After your honeymoon you can come to me, and I will see what can be done.”

But Stephen Deane was no fool.

“Mr. Langton,” he said, “I have trusted you as I would have trusted my father. I trust you now. All I ask is of you to tell me the simple truth. You have been good to me, but if—if my fifty thousand pounds isn’t forthcoming, I had better know it. I cannot act in the dark. I *will* not, sir. Can I have *any* of my capital back, sir, within a reasonable time?”

“Not a penny piece yet—not a five pound note yet,” said old Langton.

“Then you have spent it.”

“For the present it is—sunk—yes, sunk—very deep.”

“So deep that it will never rise to the surface again,” said Deane, with a queer laugh.

Langton nodded.

“That is about it. You wanted the truth and you have the truth.”

“My patrimony is gone,” said Deane.

“You receive interest; the business is there.”

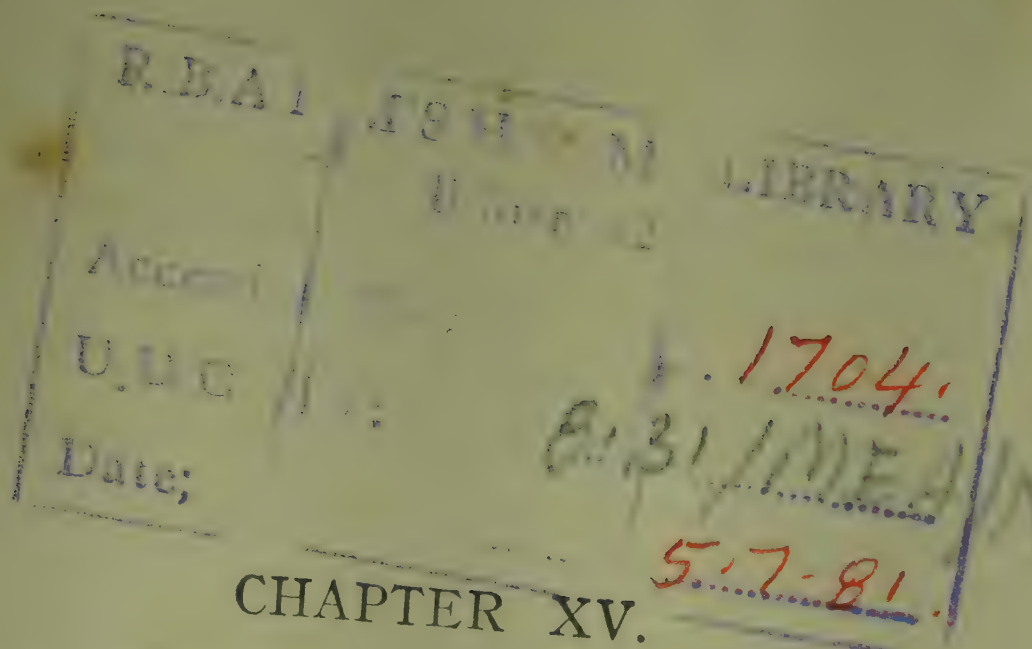
“But my own money?”

“Gone, boy, gone—sunk deep. For God’s sake, leave me—I can’t be worried—I have nothing else to say. Break off with Alice, if you like. Let me go to ruin all the quicker; push me over—I don’t care—but you have learned the truth as regards your money.”

There was a dead silence. Langton did not dare to look in the direction of the old wardrobe. Why would his mother keep on standing there? He felt certain she was waiting—listening; waiting and listening. After a pause, Deane said—

“I will endeavour to act justly, sir.”  
And he left the room without a word.





## CHAPTER XV.

WHILE Deane was occupied with Langton, Alice sat by the cosy fire in her own little sitting-room. She had a Mudie's book in her hand. In her luxurious dress, surrounded by all the appliances of wealth, she made a pretty picture. A rose-coloured lamp cast a shaded light, partly over her face, partly over her dress, partly over the open pages of the book. Alice's remarkably pretty foot peeped out from under the silken flounce of her dress. There were logs on the fire, and they hissed in the most cheerful manner. Her favourite toy Pomeranian yapped in her face once or twice, and then, seeing that she took no notice, curled himself up on the white sheepskin rug for a further nap.

Presently Alice put down her book and her dark eyes looked straight into the

dancing flames of the cheerful fire. There was a light in her eyes which also danced with extreme hope and extreme pleasure. It was in that restful and absolutely contented mood when the cup of life is so full of bliss that one extra drop would cause it to overflow.

Alice Langton was by no means a selfish girl. There were many things which might, had she chosen to consider them, cause her anxiety just now. Her father's health, for instance. She was not blind to his state. She knew well that he had passed through a very sharp illness. Her father's moral state, also ; his strange and unaccountable action towards Ursula.

Nevertheless, Alice found that she could not dwell on these things to-night. One image filled her mind's eye, one human being so completely occupied her heart, that she had no room to think of anyone else. Stephen was showing himself in a more perfect, more brilliant light every day. He loved her. It did not even occur to Alice as even possible that a man like Stephen Deane would marry a girl without giving her supreme



love. He was reserved by nature ; he would not reveal the great depths of his great tenderness until after marriage. She felt that she could wait patiently until the moment when he would pour out his full heart at her feet. Yes, he loved her ; and she was happy. She had, indeed, obtained better than gold. Stephen in all respects satisfied the highest requirements of her nature.

That last act of his—of placing Maurice Sherwood in a sound financial position—was alone enough to captivate her truest affection. She was delighted with the whole scheme. She thought of the man who so nobly spent his capital for the good of another. Alice inherited certain business instincts from her father, and she fully believed that under Sherwood's management the penny paper would be a financial success. In short, Sherwood was getting his chance—one which he would use right nobly. Ursula would be saved. The sweet children would have enough for their needs ; all would be well. As she thought of them smiles played round her lips, and her eyes grew yet brighter.

Deane would draw his capital by Saturday. On Monday, Sherwood would receive a sufficient sum in advance to keep the little house in Asprey Gardens going. Then would come the wedding and the short honeymoon. Yes : life was very good ; God was gracious. It was a delightful thing to live, a glorious thing to see the sun. She sat on, without thought of time. But, at last, raising her eyes to look at the little jewelled time-piece which stood on the mantel-shelf above her head, she was startled to realise that Deane had been waiting for her for over an hour. It suddenly occurred to her that her father must be dead tired, and that she ought to go to put a stop to the interview.

She rose, looked at her own reflection in the glass, was pleased with its comely aspect, and went off to her father's room. She turned the handle of the door and entered. The old man was sunk low in the deep arm-chair. His head was turned slightly to one side, his mouth was a very little open, his eyes were shut ; he was asleep. Alice went close to him. His breathing was quiet ;



although as she watched she perceived a spasm of pain pass across his forehead. It vanished, and he slept on. She did not dare to rouse him. She stood very still, observed with curious wonder that her father was alone, and then left the room as noiselessly as she had entered.

She met a servant in the hall.

“Hudson,” she said, “have you seen Mr. Deane?”

“Mr. Deane left more than half an hour ago, madam.”

Alice did not make any reply; she returned to her sitting-room. Again she sank into her own chair, and again she looked into the flame. But her face was no longer at rest, and there was a wondering, troubled dread at her heart, that Stephen should have gone without her when he had arranged to spend a couple of hours with her that evening. They had much to talk over—much to arrange. He was going to expound to her the whole scheme of the penny paper. It was intensely disappointing. What could it mean? Oh, of course he would return. He must have gone just to execute some

sudden message of her father's. He would certainly not go away without at least saying good-night to her. She would wait for him.

The little clock struck ten. The old servant who had been waiting on Langton came into the room. She had once been Alice's nurse.

"I think I ought to settle master for the night," she said. "Do you want to see him again, Miss Alice?"

"No," said Alice; "say good-night to my father for me, Jessop; I will not disturb him."

The woman withdrew. By and by, Hudson appeared and asked her if she required anything further.

"Nothing," said Alice.

He left the room, and she heard him bolt the front door and draw the chain across. Her heart beat with a great sense of loneliness. Still, she did not give up the hope of Stephen's reappearing.

"He will come, even though it is very late; for he did not even say good-night."



The little clock over her head struck eleven. She waited on. By and by it struck again — the hour of midnight. Then she knew he would not come. She went away very slowly to her own room.

## CHAPTER XVI.

By the first post the following morning, Alice received a letter from Deane. It was quite short.

"I have had a rather trying interview with your father, dear Alice, and when it was over could not bring myself to face you," wrote the young man. "I may or may not call to see you to-day, in the meantime say nothing whatever about me to Mr. Langton. Keep up your heart, dear, if you can. Your ever affectionate, Stephen Deane."

This letter, which greeted Alice as she stood before her well-appointed breakfast table, was scarcely the one which a woman might like best to receive from the man she was to marry in a few days. The day that



had dawned upon her was Friday: Saturday would arrive soon, then Sunday, then Monday. The following Tuesday was to be her wedding day—their wedding day, Stephen's and hers—and yet he could write like this and tell her that he might or might not call to see her to-day. Why, to-day was packed full already with affairs which concerned them both, and which both would be obliged to see. Amongst other things, Langton's own lawyers were to arrive at the Briary about noon, furnished with documents which both Alice and her future husband were to sign. Then the children of Alice's class in the Sunday School were coming to tea, and Stephen had promised to exhibit a magic lantern for their benefit, and Mags and Herbert were coming also, and afterwards Mags was to put on her finished bridesmaid's dress and Stephen was to criticise her. Several relations and friends were arriving as guests to the house that evening, and Stephen Deane was to meet them for the first time at dinner. The whole day was marked out, with Stephen in almost every hour, Stephen in almost every event,

and yet he had written to her and said that he might not come and see her. Might not ! —what did it mean ?

She put the letter into her pocket, poured herself out a cup of tea, but found she could scarcely drink it, far less taste her ordinary food.

“I was too happy last night,” she said to herself, “and I am too miserable now. What can it mean ?”

A sudden idea came to her. Stephen, of course, would be at the office, she would drive there and see him. He could not conceal that matter which was troubling him from her, his future wife, when they met face to face.

She went upstairs to her father ; the old man was up—Langton always hated lying in bed, and Mrs. Jessop was waiting on him.

“The master is much better this morning, miss,” said Jessop, turning to Alice when she appeared.

“I hope you are, father,” said Alice. She went up to him and gave him her usual morning kiss.



"You are dressed to go out," he said.

"Yes, I have a great deal to do. I have ordered the carriage—have you any messages?"

"None. What messages should I have?"

"I thought I'd ask you, father."

"I haven't any. Don't forget to be back in the house at twelve o'clock. Green and Edwards are coming, we can meet them in my snugery. Tell the servants to have a fire there."

"Yes, father," said Alice. As she left the room she was conscious of a very queer and empty feeling, a sort of sensation which there was no accounting for.

She entered the brougham and desired the coachman to drive to the City to her father's place of business. The man did so. Alice lay back in the carriage with her eyes closed. Such a sense of desolation was sweeping over her that unbidden tears rose to her closed eyes; the tears escaped beneath the eyelashes. Suddenly she roused herself.

"This won't do," she thought. She wiped away her tears and sat bolt upright. When

the carriage drew up at the main entrance to the great establishment bearing her father's name across its front, she desired the coachman to wait for her and went in. She ran upstairs and entered a room surrounded by desks and inhabited by numerous clerks. Phillips, the principal clerk, was in the room; he knew Alice, and went up to her at once.

"I want to see Mr. Deane. Has he arrived?"

"Mr. Deane has not called yet this morning, miss."

"Oh!" said Alice, who had not expected this checkmate, "but he surely comes, as a rule, much earlier."

"Yes, miss; but he hasn't been to-day."

"Have you had a letter from him?"

"No, miss."

Alice paused and thought. She began to wonder. Presently she asked Phillips if he would conduct her to her father's own office, where she might wait for a little in the hope of Stephen's arrival. The man took her there, fetched a footstool for her feet, poked up the fire, and gave her the *Times* to read.



She waited for nearly an hour, then, unable to endure her suspense any longer, got up, gave a brief message to Phillips to say she had called to see Mr. Deane on a matter of extreme importance, and left the house. She now desired her servant to take her to Stephen's rooms in St. James's Street. He drove there, she went in, saw the hall porter and was told by him that Mr. Deane had left home soon after eight o'clock that morning and had not returned since. Alice scribbled a line, which she desired the man to give to Stephen the moment he returned. She then went home.

She felt terribly restless and fearfully impatient. Her whole morning had been wasted, and she had not had even one word's conversation with Stephen.

At twelve o'clock the lawyers arrived, and Mr. Langton, looking very washed-out and feeble, came downstairs. Alice, her father, and the two men of law, waited in the sanctum for over half an hour for Deane. Deane did not come, the marriage settlements could not therefore be signed. The lawyers showed extreme annoyance, but

arranged to come again the next day. As to Langton, he expressed no surprise.

Alice was now at a white heat of anxiety ; she scarcely knew how to contain herself. She did not want to disobey her lover, and yet she felt she could scarcely endure the uncertainty any longer. Something must be frightfully wrong ; she was intensely anxious to probe her father. She could be unkind to him in her own inexplicable dread, but the old man seemed to divine her thoughts, for the moment the lawyers had gone he complained of great fatigue. Jessop was summoned, and he returned to his room.

Hudson came to announce to Alice that luncheon was served. For the sake of keeping up appearances she went into the dining-room, ate a few morsels, and then hastily desired her carriage once again. It darted through her mind to go and see Ursula. Ursula might possibly help her to bear what was becoming unbearable.

She drove to the little house in Asprey Gardens. She remembered the first time she had gone there ; Stephen on that occasion had accompanied her. She recalled the



flashing glance of a little face in the nursery window, the aspect of the house, the appearance of Herbert when he had conducted them into the cold, unused drawing-room. "Things must be better here now," she thought, "and it is Stephen who has given them relief; but oh! where is Stephen, and what can be wrong?"

She rang the front door bell. After a long interval the door was opened by Jane.

"Is your mistress in?" asked Alice.

"No, miss. Missis and Master Herbert and Miss Mags are hout, miss."

"I wonder how many checkmates I am to receive to-day," thought Alice. But just then the very slender figure of Sherwood crossed the hall. He saw Alice, recognised her, and came to meet her with outstretched hand.

"I thought at first my wife had returned. I know she forgot the latch-key," said Sherwood. "How do you do? Have you any message that I can give her?"

"May I speak to you?" said Alice suddenly.

"Yes," he replied, in a grave voice. He

looked as though he would rather not see her. She was puzzled by his appearance. She thought surely, after what Stephen had told her the day before, Sherwood would look happier, more heart-whole.

He led her immediately into the little parlour. The fire was large and bright in the grate, there was a great bunch of fresh flowers on the centre of the table, a child's toy, brightly painted and looking quite new, filled the place of honour on the sideboard. Sherwood invited his visitor to a seat, and then sat very still, awaiting her pleasure. His absent-minded face seemed to look past her into space. His eyes had an expression of one looking intently on a scene of great desolation. Alice noticed that some manuscript paper was lying on the table, some of it unwritten on, some of it covered with the small, clear writing which, as a rule, distinguishes the 'Varsity man. But the paper was pushed, as it were, to one side. She could not tell why the aspect of the room was at once inspiring and depressing, why it looked like an abode of order and disorder combined. Sherwood's patience, the



stillness of his attitude, began to tell on her. She looked fixedly at him.

“ I am anxious, and hoped to have seen your wife. The fact is—I am looking for Stephen Deane.”

“ Ah, yes, Deane,” said Sherwood.

“ I thought possibly he might be here, or that you would have news of him.”

“ He is not here,” said Sherwood, very gently ; “ and I have no present news of him—he *was* here.”

“ Was here to-day—to-day ! ” said Alice, a light leaping into her face. “ How glad I am ! When did he come ? ”

“ I am thankful to tell you that he arrived between twelve and one o'clock. My wife and the children went out half an hour previously ; I do not expect them home until tea time ; they will have had about four hours' perfect enjoyment. It is Mags' birthday, my wife took them out as a treat. They have gone to the Zoo.”

Sherwood dropped these sentences from his lips very slowly. The dreary expression in his eyes became more marked. Still, Alice was so absorbed in her own sense of

disquiet that she had little time to give to him.

“I am sorry,” said Sherwood, rising now deliberately to his feet, “that I have no further news. Deane has probably gone to see you long ere this.”

Alice also rose. She looked now full at the man and observed his face. “I am in trouble,” she said simply.

He glanced back at her. He was a writer, also a reader of men’s hearts—he read anguish in her eyes. Suddenly he held out his hand. “This is a day of tribulation for us both, then,” he said.

She let her little hand be clasped by his ; his own surrounded it with a strong, firm pressure.

“I would say to you, as I have said over and over to myself for the last hour and a-half—

“Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan His work in vain ;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.”

“But I don’t understand,” said Alice.

“I mean that my own trouble is of the nature——”



“Stephen has no secrets from me, Mr. Sherwood, about what has happened. I thought that you would be glad, that Ursula would be happy ; we were both of us happy ourselves about this. Has anything fresh happened ? ”

“ I think so,” said Sherwood. “ But I am exceedingly glad that my wife was away before the blow fell. We were both a good bit uplifted yesterday—you can scarcely realise what a relief we experienced, what a frightfully heavy load was taken from our hearts. We thought of the children, too, and how the answer to their wonderful childlike faith would sustain and help them always. This morning we resolved to begin a better state of things for them. That toy belongs to Mags. It was by her plate at breakfast time, and Herbert bought the flowers with a few pence in his savings box. Then I was busy over a story ; it was forming itself with great force in my brain, the characters presenting themselves with marvellous vitality. I think it would have been my best work.”

“ You meant it for the paper,” said Alice

eagerly. "Your own story to begin the weekly paper—and why not?—why not?"

He had loosened her hand. "God is His own interpreter," he said. "My wife and the children went out—they went to the Zoo—they will be back at tea time—the children will go upstairs, then I shall tell her."

"What! Oh, how you frighten me!"

"Dear Miss Langton, you were kind and meant to help me, and Deane is the very soul of kindness. I pitied him to-day when he called far more than I pitied myself, but the fact is simply this. He is debarred at present from raising the capital for his small venture, therefore the small venture must be delayed. I am as I was—we are as we were—that is all. I cannot discuss it, nor attempt even for a moment to pretend to you that it is not a most crushing disappointment, but we shall live through it—oh, yes! of course we shall. Now, don't fret, Deane will explain his reasons. He is kind, more than kind—he would have helped me had the matter been possible. May I see you to the door?"



The man's dignity was unassailable, the man's courage was unapproachable. Alice felt more ashamed than she had ever been before in her life. She got back into the carriage and drove to her own home. There she sat for a long time, absorbed in a weighty grief. She knew something, but not all. The cry of her heart still was, "Why does not Stephen come?"

The rest of the day was spent as it had been appointed. The Sunday School children arrived for their treat, but there was no magic lantern, nor did the little Sherwoods put in an appearance. The visitors came who were to stay in the house until after the wedding, and were conducted to their rooms. By and by they surrounded Alice in the amber drawing-room. She came down fully dressed, looking as though she had not a care in her life. What will not a brave woman hide, when to hide her sorrow means the best for her beloved? She was still expecting Stephen, he would surely not desert her at this dinner, given in his honour; but he did not come, nor was Langton quite well enough to come downstairs. Alice sup-

ported the evening as best she could and entertained her visitors, and by and by the slow hours dragged themselves away, and to her infinite pleasure, her different guests elected to go to their rooms, and once more she was alone.

“I wonder how much longer I can live through this agony,” thought the girl. “I have come to a point when nothing possibly can be done. Stephen has deserted me all day, he has been unfaithful to his promised word to me. Poor dear Ursula! No wonder he is ashamed—what does it mean!”

As these thoughts flashed through her brain the door was opened, and Deane entered. She gave a great start when she saw him, a smothered cry rose to her lips. Then she ran to him, expecting him to take her in his arms, but his arms hung to his sides, his face was that of a man who had suffered shipwreck.

“What does this mean? Where have you been all day?”

“In a place where God’s face is never seen.”

“Stephen, you are driving me mad!”



A quick expression of pity filled his eyes. Then, with an effort, he took her hand, then he led her near to the fire where the warmth penetrated them both. This was necessary, for in very truth they both felt cold as ice. Stephen said then in a strained voice —

“I have but a very few words to give you, Alice—the fewer the better. I must speak, because I have to say these words. I would not come earlier in the day.”

“Yes; but oh, be quick! Get them over!” said Alice.

But suddenly, as he struggled to speak, the power failed him. He seemed to read all in an instant—how devotedly, how nobly this woman loved him, and he was about to strike a blow at her very heart! He would have been tender then, had he dared, but tenderness was fatal. It might come later, but not now. It was with a terrible sympathy in his eyes, however, that he still caressed her, and those eyes helped him to endure. She raised her face, looked full up at him.

“All day I have been searching for you,”

she said. "First I went to the office, you were not there; then I went to your rooms, you were not there—I left a message in one place, I left a note in the other."

He nodded, but still he did not speak.

"I came home, the lawyers arrived—they are coming to-morrow."

Words hurried to his lips, but he did not utter them, only his face turned very grey, and he was more upright than before.

"After lunch," continued Alice, "I thought of Ursula, and went to her. She was out, but he was in. I saw him."

"You saw Sherwood?"

"Yes."

"Then surely, Alice, I need not say anything."

"I want to know what it means," she continued, partly letting, as it were, the very thought of Sherwood drop from her mind, "I want to know what it all means, your dishonoured word, your talk to him."

"Dear, I cannot conceal the truth from you. I do not know who has been to blame. Perhaps I myself, for being the witless, thoughtless, over-trustful fool I was; but



I will not say more, only this is what has happened, Alice. Your father wished us to marry. We—wished it ourselves. You were supposed to be very rich, I had a fair allowance—the marriage was possible. I went to your father last night and asked to withdraw £10,000 from my capital; he there and then explained to me that my request was impossible.”

“What do you mean?” interrupted Alice.

“He explained matters exceedingly fully. My capital does not exist. I am, in short, except for a paltry position—which at the present moment amounts to nothing—in your father’s business, a penniless man. The money left to me by my own father has vanished—it is not there. Don’t be angry, dear; the thing goes too deep for mere anger—only of course, Alice, you understand that we cannot be married.”

“Stephen!” She gave a most bitter cry.

“No, dear. One in my position cannot unite himself to one in yours.”

Then she became half wild.

“Why do you mock me with false words?”

You know you will not marry the disgraced daughter of a disgraced father ! ”

“ Before God, you are wrong. Your father is nothing to me, you are everything. But I will not take you and your wealth with nothing of my own to meet it. Understand, Alice——”

He stooped towards her now. She would have fallen if he had not lifted her in his arms—he had to put those arms round her. Suddenly she became heavy, as heavy as though she had no life. He looked into her face. She had fainted. He laid her tenderly on the sofa, he stood by her until she began to revive. Before she could know where she was, he had stooped and printed the lightest of kisses on her brow. Then he left her and the house.



## CHAPTER XVII.

LANGTON felt better the next day. All night he had slept soundly ; his indisposition was leaving him. He was no longer troubled by the apparition of his mother standing by the door of the old wardrobe. When Jessop came into the room, he told her that he could dress himself and was coming down to breakfast. He remarked also—

“ The house is full of visitors ; this is Saturday ; on Tuesday the wedding will take place. I have to attend to my guests now ; afterwards, if I must be ill, I must.”

The woman left him. She did not much like his appearance, but she was too wary, too wise and accustomed to his moods to make any audible objection.

Langton appeared before Alice did in the large and beautifully furnished breakfast-

room. Two uncles of the bride on the mother's side, with their wives and daughters, had arrived the day before. There was also an old cousin with a shrewd face and kindly manner, and there were two young men and three girls whom Alice used to know at school. In short, the party ought to have been a very merry one. Langton received his guests with hearty words of cheer. His face was very much flushed, but otherwise he seemed quite well. Alice was rather late appearing. She was dressed with extreme care. If she had shed tears the previous night, she showed no trace of them. If she was in trouble, it did not show in her eyes, nor in her sweet, gentle courteous voice. She attended to everyone's comfort, but little to her own, and altogether satisfied her father completely.

"I say!" he cried somewhat noisily from his end of the table, "we ought to have Deane here. Allie, why did you not invite him to breakfast this morning? He would have come fast enough. Deane's the sort of fellow who knows what's good for him—eh, Allie—eh? Knows when he sees a pretty



girl, and a rich one, too. What do you think, Mr. Price ? ”

Langton turned to a young man who was seated at a little distance from his end of the table, and who secretly adored Alice as the most delightful woman in the world. Price coloured, and responded to old Langton's remarks with a warm affirmative.

Breakfast came to an end ; the guests dispersed ; the father and daughter were alone.

“ Well, child—well,” said Langton. “ The day is uncommon near now. Only what is left of this one, and Sunday—*and* Monday. Then we greet the bride.”

He stooped suddenly and kissed her with unwonted affection on her forehead.

“ You are a good girl,” he said, “ a very good girl—too good for an old man like me. You'll make Deane no end of a first-rate wife. By the way, Alice, he came round last night—I know he did for Jessop told me. What was he doing with himself all yesterday ? Have you any idea ? ”

“ I did not ask him, father.”

“ Quite right—don't begin by badgering a

man—he can't stand it, I can assure you. But, by the way, you reminded him—did you not—of the fact that the blessed lawyers will be here to-day at noon. Their tempers must not be tampered with a second time. You spoke of that, didn't you? It was really inexcusable, his being away from that."

"He won't come to-day," said Alice.

She looked up at him now, speaking very gently. He glanced back at her, read something that he did not like in her eyes, and staggered very slightly. What *was* that shadow? If that old mother of his dared to venture into the breakfast-room—to follow him about, life could not be borne! Alice pushed him down into an easy chair. Then she knelt by him and took his hands.

"Father, I am not going to say one single word to blame you. Your ideas of business and mine are widely different. But I am your child, and your child will never blame you. Father, dear, you are an old man, and you want someone to look after you——"

"I shall have that some one in you, my



girl. You will live in the same house, you know, you and Stephen. A nice chap— young Stephen Deane.”

“ I shall live in the same house with you, father ; always, as long as you live, your daughter will love and cherish you. But, father, when Stephen came last night, he came with news. He does not understand your business principles.”

“ Confound him — the scoundrel ! — the scoundrel ! ” said old Langton, roused to sudden fury and intense and violent alarm. “ What on earth does this prattle mean ? Don’t pause, for Heaven’s sake ! Don’t prevaricate—don’t delay—out with it, whatever it is ! ”

“ We are engaged no longer,” said Alice. “ It is just a fact that must be faced. Our engagement is broken off, it is Stephen’s wish—and ”—she made a long pause— “ mine. There will be no wedding on Tuesday.”

Her voice sank very low. She leaned her head for a moment against her father’s shoulder. Then she rose to her feet.

Langton did not speak at all for a few

minutes. Then he said, abruptly, and with apparent quiet—

“I thought that young fellow would play the fool. He is the sort of man who does.”

“He is an honourable man, father,” interrupted his daughter.

“Then may all honourable men go to perdition!” was the angry retort. Langton rose and walked with tottering steps towards the door. Alice longed to call after him, to ask him what he meant to do, to find out what she ought to do. The preparations for the wedding were still going on—they must not go on. The whole thing would drive her mad—she must not be driven mad; at any cost she would keep her senses. Langton reached the door, opened it and went out; he closed it softly behind him. Then the girl flung her hands up high above her head, uttered a sharp and exceedingly bitter cry, and fell, face foremost, on a sofa which stood not far from the fire.

How long she lay there she could not tell, but presently she heard a voice addressing her. She looked up and saw one of the girls who had come as a guest to this





"Then the girl flung her hands up high above her head."





house of festivity. The girl was very young, not more than seventeen. She had a fresh and pretty face. Her eyes, very much startled by the sight she was gazing at, were fixed fully on Alice. Alice said, "Oh, Bertha, do go away."

"Is anything wrong—can I help you?" asked the girl.

"By just going away from me for a little, by amusing the others if you can, Bertha, and by telling them nothing—nothing at all—of what you have just witnessed."

"Oh, yes, I will do that; I think I can manage," was the eager answer. "I should be so sorry to be in the way, but if I can help——"

"Yes, you can help."

"I will manage it, then," she said. She looked with great eagerness at Alice, as though she longed with the eager worship of a very young girl to fling herself at her feet.

"Then go, dear, and begin to help at once," was Alice's quick answer. Bertha saw that her presence could not be endured. She left the room slowly. When she had

gone Alice rose and began to pace up and down. She was so occupied, when the door was opened and Oliver Langton came in. He shut the door and locked it. He then went up to Alice.

“You know,” he said, “of course, the reason for Deane’s conduct?”

“Yes, I know.”

“It is not so very serious, Alice; just for the present I am not able to accommodate him to the tune of £10,000. But I have in reality plenty of money in my possession.”

“Then why——” began the daughter.

“Why, why——” he interrupted, storm in his voice and in his eyes, “why will a woman who knows nothing attempt to dictate to a man who knows everything? I tell you what it is, Alice, you women are the cause of our undoing. You have not the most remote idea how dreadfully you try and torture us. We have the weight of the world on our shoulders; we endure stoically and silently, whereas you shriek out if a pin pricks. Now hear me out——” for she was about, once again, to interrupt his speech. “There are some men like women,



and I regret to say that Stephen Deane is one."

"Father, how can you speak so? Father, this is more than I can bear!"

"It is because you *are* bearing his squeamish womanliness that you are suffering at this moment. Why should not you and he marry? There is money to go on with—there is not money to withdraw in thousands from the business. That is the position."

"But Stephen's own money—it is gone!"

"For the present, doubtless. It is sunk in different investments."

"Father," said Alice, "will you not even now try and tell me the real truth? You told Stephen that his money was gone."

"He holds the business for security. A pretty good one, I can assure you."

She was silent. After a moment she said—

"Stephen loved that money, his father toiled to leave it to him. You took it and—lost it. You took bread from him and offer him a stone. Oh, father, I understand him better than I understand you!"

"Doubtless," said old Langton in a sneering voice, "you are in love with him, there-

fore all he does is good. The old man is nothing and nobody. What he does is not worth considering."

"Have I ever done anything to cause you to speak to me in that tone?" she answered.

There was something in her face which made him look at her very earnestly. The gloom on his brow lightened, he put his hand on her shoulder.

"If there is a living creature I should like to make happy, you are the one, Alice," he said. "I have come down here to speak to you on that very subject. You yourself can explain to Stephen Deane—you can tell him."

"What, father, what?"

"The money is gone for the present, but it will all be redeemed and saved. I will make him a partner in my business and make his share of the capital not £50,000, but £100,000. At my death all goes to him. Now, is not this compensation? Tell him so, only I don't want to see him at present. My head is weak, I can't stand much. Tell him what I have said, and then



come back to me. Where can you find him ? ”

“ Nowhere,” she answered.

She clasped her hands loosely together. She looked out of the window, which was partly open, for the day was almost as fine as summer. But her eyes took in nothing of what she was gazing at.

“ I can’t find him,” she said in a gentle voice, “ and if I could, I would not go to him with that message. He wanted some of his capital in order to do a kindness. He had promised faithfully to help one who most sorely needed help. He was obliged to go to that person yesterday and tell him that he must go back on his word, that it was impossible for him to give his friend the succour he had promised. That friend bore it as a brave man will. I happened to see him, therefore I know.”

“ What was the name of the friend ? ” asked Langton, sharp suspicion in his tone.

“ Why do you ask me ? You need not know.”

“ Was it that fool, Maurice Sherwood ? ”

Alice coloured.

"I knew it; I might have guessed it! All my troubles come to me through the Sherwoods."

"Father, you do not talk with your usual sense; you are ill."

"I am well enough, child, if I were not driven to death by the fact of having a number of drivelling fools round me. Now, Alice, consider. There is still time to bring Stephen to his senses. He need not see me; after the wedding I shall be all right, I shall be back at the office the day after. You and Stephen can stay away for at least a month, for two months if you like better. When you come back I shall be able to give him the money. You had best go and find him this minute; there is still a sufficient interval before the lawyers appear. Tell him what I have said, but tell it in your own words. He was overcome yesterday, he lost his senses for a bit, he will get them back to-day. I swear to you, Alice, that I will give him £10,000 to throw away, like any other philanthropic fool, when you and he return from your wedding tour. Go to him,



child ; you can have a hansom, don't wait for the carriage—go and tell him.”

She turned when he had done speaking:

“ No, father.”

“ What do you mean ? No ! Then must I go ? ”

“ Oh no, dear father.”

“ You will do nothing ? ”

“ Nothing to bring him back to me, until——” tears choked her voice, but she soon mastered herself. “ If I could give him the money, I would bring him back. I cannot, and therefore he must stay away. I see his motive. It has broken my heart, but I honour him for it.”

“ Are those your last words on the matter ? ”

“ My last. Don't let us think any more about the wedding. When I woke this morning I had no hope. God has taken him away from me as completely as though he had never existed. For a few happy months I thought that the great joy of being Stephen's wife was to be mine. That intense delight will never be realised. I know it, as we know the truth after we die.”

“Good God!” said old Langton, “what a solemn face you wear, and you have just—just the look my mother has had for the last few days. I wish to heaven the old woman would get out of the house, she’s always about. As sure as fate she’s in this room now, listening to you, nodding at you, approving you. It’s the sort of thing she’d have done, but there!—what are you to do with me? How am I to be situated—how am I to face the world?”

He sank piteously down on the same sofa where Alice had flung herself. Alice knelt down by him.

“I said I would never forsake you,” she said slowly, “and I won’t; you know I won’t.”

He looked hard at her. There was a wild, unappeased hunger in his eyes. Then he flung his arms round her and strained her to his heart; all of a sudden those arms loosened, the emotion, even the passion went out of his face.

“After all, nothing matters,” he said; “I am a fool to mind—why should I mind? There’s my mother in the room.” He looked



back over his shoulder, his cheeks blanched. "I know she is there, just by the curtain, and she—she approves of you—she approves—Alice, Alice!"

He clung to her like a frightened child; she held his hand between both her own.

"You are weak," she said, "your nerves are out of order. We must put off the guests, we have no time to consider our feelings for the next few hours. Let me act for you, I promise to be quick and prompt."

"Have you no thought for yourself?" said Langton.

"I shall think for myself by and by. Now it is the guests—the wedding preparations, which must be stopped—and you—and the lawyers."

"It is a quarter to twelve," said Langton suddenly, "those fools from Chancery Lane will be here in no time."

"You and I together will tell them the truth, father."

Langton put his hand to his head.

"Sometimes I don't know what is truth," he replied. "I feel strange—the world is floating away from me—I——"

He clutched hold of Alice's shoulder, then with a great effort he recovered himself.

"You will be better when you are out of this house," she said. "You have had rather a sharp illness; you and I will go from home."

"That is a good idea," he answered. "But there was to be a wedding, only——"

He put his hand again to his head. "I forget things somehow," he continued. Then his face brightened. "Of course I remember. There was to have been a wedding, but the bridegroom would not come up to the scratch. Well, Alice, if your bridegroom forsakes you for a whim, less than a whim, your old father will stick to you."

"We will go away together," she replied.

Just at that moment one of the uncles, accompanied by a girl, passed the window. This fact recalled Langton to the memory of the guests who were staying in his house.

"What about the visitors?" he said. "The aunts, the uncles, the young folks, the gay folks, the silly folks, the wise folks. Why, the house is choke full! How are we to get rid of them?"



“I will manage it,” answered the daughter. “You and I will go away together; we need not tell them until after we have gone. A letter will acquaint them with the fact.”

“Good,” he replied. He looked intensely relieved. “In some ways this is better than a wedding,” he continued. “It saves me from——” his face turned white, he looked full at her and said slowly—

“I am a hunted man, Alice; hunted down—the dogs are out. They scent me, the hounds do; they scent the old man—they are eager for his blood. Alice, Alice!”

There was a sound of wheels on the gravel outside, and in a moment Hudson tapped at the door. He came to say that Messrs. Green and Edwards were waiting in the library.

“Come, father,” said Alice.

She felt calm now, she was suffering no longer. All the emotions of her heart, all the strength of her intellect, were given up to the care of her father. Whoever else needed her at that moment, he needed her with the despair of the despairing, the feeble clasp of the dying. She took his hand; a

minute later they had both entered the large and magnificent library of the old house. Here were to be found rare books and many choice editions. Some of the volumes were magnificent in their binding, and one and all gave evidence of refinement, culture, and leisure. Alice had herself collected these treasures, having put the matter into the hands of one of the best book collectors of the day. Time was when she was fond of reading, and had thought a great deal of the library. She gave it little consideration now, however.

"How do you do, Miss Langton?" said Green, the older of the two lawyers. "I trust," he added, "that Mr. Stephen Deane won't keep us waiting to-day. Of course, one must make excuses for a young gentleman in his circumstances, but still——"

"There are no excuses necessary," replied Alice. She glanced at her father. He was trembling, his lips were quivering. He was trying hard to utter words, but no words would come.

"We ought to have let you know sooner," began Alice, "but——"



It was at that instant that Langton unexpectedly recovered his speech.

“Facts are facts,” he thundered, “and this, Green, this, Edwards, is the shameful state of the case. Those marriage settlements are not worth the parchment they are inscribed upon, for there is to be no wedding. No, sirs—confound you, sirs, what are you staring at? There is to be no marriage! Neither my daughter nor I, therefore, need your help to-day. No marriage, remember. Such a thing as breaking off an engagement at the eleventh hour has occurred before, and no further words of mine can make a patent fact any more plain. There is to be no marriage. Come, Alice.”

He took her hand and turned and left the room. The two lawyers stared at each other; they knew Langton and his peculiarities all too well, but this thunder-clap took them, as they expressed it, “off their feet.” Each was silent for the space of a minute. “What can young Deane be about?” said Edwards then.

Green shook his head. “The girl must have broken it off,” he said; “Deane never

would, it was too good a speculation for him."

"Some of the gossip we heard unexpectedly yesterday has a grain of truth in it, to my way of thinking," said Edwards. "Deane is a sharp chap, and he knows well when the rats leave the old ship. At any rate we'll have a pretty bill of costs, and we'll send it in as soon as possible. Come along, Green. Purcell and his wife have arranged to call this morning before lunch; they are both clients worth attending to."

The lawyers went.

Meanwhile Langton's guests amused themselves with much contentment. The ladies shopped, the men, those of them who had London clubs, visited them, and Bertha, the pretty girl who had seen something of the trouble which was breaking Alice's heart, did her utmost to keep the secret from the rest. It was between five and six o'clock on the same afternoon when the wedding guests re-entered the beautiful old house.

"Alice must be very busy—so little time now and so much to be done," said one of the married ladies.



“Yes, poor girl. But what a comfort for her to get away from that dreadful old father,” remarked another.

“The Deanes intend to live here; she won’t get so very far from him, after all,” said a third.

Then someone else said that he for one was much disappointed at not having met Deane the evening before, and hoped that he should do so that night; and someone else remarked that whatever Langton might be, he was a good father to Alice, and looked far, very far from well.

In short, all the visitors were full of comments, kindly some, indifferent others, but all bearing on the fact that a great wedding was soon to be solemnised, and that they themselves were having a good time. They had congregated in the great central hall, and it was on this scene that Hudson appeared.

“Tea is served, ladies and gentlemen,” he said, and he conducted the visitors to an inner hall opening from the outer one. One of the ladies dropped into a place by the tea tray.

“Where is Miss Alice?” she enquired.

Hudson replied in carefully chosen words.

“I have a painful duty to perform, ladies and gentlemen. A most unlooked-for event has taken place. It is this; the wedding is postponed for the present, and in consequence, Miss Alice and Mr. Langton left home two hours ago. Miss Alice told me that I was to attend to all your comforts and was to tell you that the wedding was unexpectedly postponed, and that Mr. Langton’s health obliged her to take him from home at once. You was to have all possible things that you required, and my missis and master left here with many regrets. I have no further particulars, and don’t know anything more myself.”

Hudson’s words were drowned in a storm of wonder, conjecture, and anger. The bomb had truly fallen—what could it mean? Even tea was forgotten. The intense human interest of the broken-off wedding and the sudden departure from the house of the host and the young hostess absorbed each brain. It is true that many unkind things were said and that the relations, in particular,



were exceedingly angry. But Bertha did what she could to throw oil on the troubled waters, and so far succeeded that one old lady wept and said she had felt in her bones that trouble was near, while another asked to be put in immediate communication with her maid, in order that she might get off that very night. Meanwhile, the men conversed in knots, and said that in their opinion the whole thing was accounted for by business trouble.

All the visitors went away, some that evening, the rest by the earliest train in the morning; and for all the Briary knew to the contrary, Alice's wedding might never have been contemplated.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"I AM sorry to tell you, sir, that Mr. Langton is not at the office."

"But I wrote to him—he expected me," said William Keyes. "I told him in my letter that I would be here to-day."

"Mr. Langton is not well, sir; he has been confined to the house for over a week."

"What is his private address?" asked Keyes.

The clerk went to consult the managing clerk. He came back in a few minutes with Langton's address written on a piece of paper.

"I don't expect you'll find him at home, sir; but this is where he lives. Of course, any information you like to give us will be forwarded from here when we know Mr. Langton's address."



"I have no information to give, and I don't want letters forwarded from here; I require to see Mr. Langton himself."

"That is his address, sir," replied the clerk.

The stranger left the office. He went downstairs and re-entered the hansom which had conveyed him to the great commercial centre where Langton pursued his daily vocations, and desired the man to drive straight to the Briary on Campden Hill. As he drove through the crowded streets, William Keyes leaned forward and folded his arms on the doors of the hansom. He was eagerly watching the changes which had taken place since last he visited London.

"Marvellous!" he kept saying to himself, as he observed where thoroughfares were widened and old streets had disappeared, as he noted the spots where vast new buildings had been erected on the sites of old ones. He uttered a quick sigh. The London of his youth had passed away, he did not like it. A sense of melancholy stole over him.

"I hope I'll find that fellow Langton, or at least get his address," he said to himself,

“for I want to take the train to Barnstaple this evening, and should like to get a peep at dear old Jack’s little Ursula first. Bless me—it does seem strange that I should be able to see that girl whom my old and best friend so worshipped! If he had known it when he was dying, he would have sent a world of messages to her. Never knew anything like his devotion to her.”

“‘She is my dream, William,’ he used to say. ‘She is my dream girl, she is my star. I dream of her at night and think of her all day. I never want to see her, not specially badly. I’d rather keep her as a sort of vision. I fancy her just like her mother, and I don’t want to have that fancy disturbed. Best not to see her. She will be pleased about the money, although of course she may be very rich—cursedly rich; but even so, she won’t reject the devotion of a life-time. In the sweat of my brow I earned it for her—gold piece by gold piece, I put it by for her. Well, it kept me happy, and straight too, I expect. I have a sort of fancy, William, old chap, that I will see little Ursula’s mother pretty



soon up there, and I'll have a good few minutes when I am telling her how I worked for her child.' "

William Keyes, as he thought over this old memory, found it necessary to blow his nose very vigorously.

"Wonder what she is like," he thought. "I hope she won't be cold and haughty, and a fine lady. I want a soft bit of a thing, someone whom I can fancy looking at Jack and thanking him more with the eyes than the lips, more with the heart than just with empty words. But I haven't a notion what she is like, nor where she is, nor any single blessed thing about her. Her name's Ursula—that is about all I know. For that matter, I don't even know her surname—he never mentioned it, and I forgot to ask him, thinking that I'd never have the chance of seeing her. Well, I guess I'll see her soon. Can this be Campden Hill? Bless me—bless me! There used to be green fields here, when I left the old place. All houses now—houses and streets. A beastly shame, I call it."

The hansom turned up Hornton Street,

and presently turned into the gates which led to the Briary. Keyes sprang out of the vehicle and sounded the bell sharply. Hudson came to answer it.

“Look here,” said Keyes. He put on his most Colonial manner. “I have come to see your master. I know he is a bit hipped—off his work—all that sort of thing ; but if you go to him and say that William Keyes, who wrote to him on the subject of —well—of a certain young lady, is waiting to have a word with him, you will oblige me, my good fellow. Sharp’s the word now, for I want to see that girl before dusk, as I am due to take the night train to Devonshire. What on earth are you staring at, you fellow, you ? Go, and find out at once if your master can see William Keyes. Why, confound you ! what is the matter ? ”

For Hudson’s wooden face had not only failed to betray the smallest scrap of interest, but had also managed, in some indefinable way, to give Keyes a strange sense of the absolute futility of his words.

“Be quick ! look slippy ! ” he cried in much exasperation.



“ I am sorry, sir,” said Hudson, “ but Mr. Langton’s not at home.”

“ Not at home ! ” thundered Keyes. “ Is there anyone else at home ? ”

“ Miss Langton is also from home, sir.”

“ Miss Langton ? ” said Keyes, in a puzzled manner. “ Look here, my good fellow, I suppose you know a sovereign when you see it. Here is a sovereign for you now, and please answer this question straight. Is Miss Langton’s Christian name Ursula ? ”

Hudson had the most delicate perception of the value of a sovereign. He could slip it into his palm without apparently knowing that he was touching it. He did so now, and answered with the utmost respect that the young lady’s name was Alice.

“ Then is there no one at home to whom I can speak ? ”

“ I regret, sir, that the family is away.”

“ When are they likely to return ? ”

“ That, sir, I equally regret that I cannot inform you.”

“ Will you have the goodness then, fellow, to give me their present address ? ”

“ Sir, I must protest that I am not permitted to do so.”

“ Not permitted ? Here is another sovereign. Oh, you may take it openly, there’s no one looking. Here are sovereigns, two of ’em. I want to see old Langton, for I guess he’s not a chicken ; I want to see him at once—where is he ? ”

Hudson put his hands behind his back as though he would ward off temptation. .

“ I greatly regret, sir, to have to inform you that I don’t know Mr. Langton’s address. It’s his ’abit, sir, to go away promiscuous-like, and often we know nothing of where the family is until the family returns.”

“ Whom may the family consist of ? ”

“ Master, and young miss.”

“ And that is all you know ? ”

“ *Hall*, I regret to say ; but if you’d like to call again, sir, say in a day or two, miss and master may have returned. Will you leave your name, sir ? ”

“ I have told you my name. I don’t keep paste-boards, if that is what you allude to. I will come back again—confound it ! hard lines, I call it ! ”



Now Keyes might have left the Langtons and gone away to Barnstaple that night, and the whole story which his heart was full of might never have passed his lips, and Ursula might never have known of that life-long devotion which had been given to her for her mother's sake by a lonely man, had not just then two remarkably pretty children been seen coming up the avenue. They were accompanied by a nursemaid, who wore her hair in a pig-tail. There was something about the look of this small boy and this very dimpled girl which acted in the most marvellous and soothing way on old William Keyes. He said: "Bless me" once, and then twice; and then it came into his head that he would like to play with these babes, and for this purpose he stood in the middle of the path and took off his hat and bowed to them in what he considered an irresistibly funny way.

The dimpled girl wanted to go past him, but the boy, who was never afraid of anything, stood still.

"Please let us pass," said the boy's voice.

"It's no use your going up to the house,"

said Keyes, "the family are away. What do *you* want with houses where the family are away?"

"We have a note for Alice from mother," remarked Herbert.

"'Es—a note from muzzer," said Mags, raising her eyes and fixing them full on the stranger.

"Your mother won't get an answer to the note, for Alice has left no address," said Keyes.

"Is 'oo," said Mags, "a big, big bwown faiwy?"

Keyes burst into a delighted roar of laughter.

"Yes, that is just what I am," he said.

"What does 'oo want in dis place, dear faiwy?" asked Mags again.

"You're a nice little thing—I have taken a great fancy to you," said Keyes, "and to you, too, young sir. I am a very unhappy fairy, for I can't get what I want."

"P'waps we might help 'oo," said Mags.

But the brown fairy shook his head.

"No, no," he said; "you're too young, you are much, much too young. If you



were a little older, indeed, and if your name was Ursula—but——”

“*I’s* Mags,” said the dimpled one; “but *I’s* little *dirl* to Ursula, aren’t I, Herbert?”

“Yes,” said Herbert. “But come on now, Mags, and let’s give the note.”

“Nothing of the sort,” cried the brown fairy; “for I must see your Ursula, and before I am an hour older.”

Mags drew herself up in a very dignified fashion.

“*I’s* little *dirl* to Ursula,” she repeated, “and I calls her ‘muzzer.’ ’Oo is not to call my muzzer Ursula.”

“Don’t care what I call her if only I can see her, and as soon as possible,” said the brown fairy.

“Come on, Mags,” said Herbert again. “We don’t know you, sir,” he repeated, “and we has got to give a note from our mother to Miss Langton. ’Spect it’s to be forwarded now. We’s got to give it.”

“All right,” said the brown fairy. “I have got a hansom here. If you insist on going up to the house I will walk with you, and you can give the note and afterwards

drive back to your mother in the hansom with me."

"Oh—oh!" said Mags. "Nice, nice! I 'ike hansoms," she added, looking full up into William Keyes' honest, sunburnt face.

He held out his hand and she clasped it; it was only dignified and proper that Herbert should clasp his other hand, and in that fashion the three returned to the house. The big fairy suggested that he, being so much the oldest and the largest, and in consequence the strongest, should pull the bell, and to this suggestion the boy and girl were willing to agree. Hudson reappeared. He quite started when he saw the gentleman who had tipped him rather handsomely five minutes ago returning with the little Sherwoods.

"Now, Master and Miss Sherwood," he said, "it's no good. Miss Alice is away, and I can't forward no letters, 'cause why?—I don't know her address."

"We'd best leave it, perhaps," said Herbert. "Keep it very carefully, Hudson, and give it to her the instant minute she comes home."



Hudson declared his willingness to oblige. William Keyes, who was feeling more delighted each moment, was extremely inclined to tip him another sovereign, but thought better of it.

“ So your mother is Mrs. Sherwood, Ursula Sherwood,” he said, addressing Mags. “ Well, that’s all right. I have something to say to Ursula Sherwood, and before long, too ; so now, into the hansom we get. Nurse,” he turned to the squint-eyed girl, “ you hop in first ; Mr. Herbert, you sit on nurse’s knee ; Miss Dimples, you sit on mine. Nurse, what is the address of your mistress ? ”

The nursemaid, blushing and stammering, murmured the words, “ 11, Asprey Gardens,” and away went the hansom, just as though the fairies themselves were guiding it. As to Mags, she took an immense fancy to William Keyes on the spot.

“ We’s awful poor, you know, faiwy,” she said, turning round and looking into his face.

This announcement, made with great vigour and instantly repressed by Herbert

as quite wide of the mark, caused Keyes considerable consternation. Was this marvellous Ursula, this Ursula Sherwood whom he had discovered in such an unexpected, such an amazing way, really the wrong person? For the right Ursula must be rich. Had she not lately, so lately, been given £60,000?

"Mags, you oughtn't to talk of those things," said Herbert, and then Keyes decided to ask no questions, but to wait until events developed themselves. By and by they reached that ugly street which goes by so charming a name, and they drew up at No. 11. Here they all got out, Keyes tossing the driver half a sovereign and walking up the steps accompanied by the children. It was Ursula herself who opened the door.

"Why, my darlings——" she began. But then she saw William Keyes, a total stranger, a sunburnt, bearded man with good-natured brown eyes, and an anxious look round his lips. "Why, darlings," said Ursula again.

"He's bwown faiwy, muzzer," said Mags, and she pulled and tugged at William's

hands in her great endeavours to get so desirable a person into the house.

“We met him at the Briary, mother,” said Herbert, “and he was so excited, for he wanted someone called Ursula, and when we told him that was your name he said he’d come to see you.”

“Madam,” said Keyes, when the children’s words allowed him time to utter a sentence of his own, “I will not come into your house until I know whether I am wrong or right. I hail from Auckland, madam. I was the chosen comrade and dearest friend of a right good fellow called Jack Hilyard. What—you don’t know him?” For Ursula’s face did not betray the slightest emotion. “Ah, well! Ah, well! I may have to go further to find her, but find her I will—she who was his star, his vision, the wonderful creature for whom he lived! But tell me, madam, first—before a lonely old man pursues a somewhat forlorn quest—what was your name before you were married?”

“You astonish and perplex me very much,” said Ursula, “but you look kind, and I believe you are honest.”



“ Oh, muzzer, muzzer, he’s a faiwy ! ” cried Mags, clinging to her mother’s skirt with one hand, while she desperately clutched at Keyes’ coat-tails with the other. “ He’s good, he’s vedy good. He’s a faiwy, muzzer.”

“ Let me speak, darling,” said Ursula. “ I believe you are honest,” she said, “ and the little one calls you good, and little children generally know. But you are quite, quite a stranger to me. I was called Ursula Ward. There is no sense in my keeping the name from you.”

“ I never heard her surname,” thought Keyes to himself ; “ it might have been Ward, it might have been anything. But she looks as though she must have been *his* Ursula. I have it,” he thought. “ Answer me yet another question, madam. Where did you live before you were married ? ”

“ There is no harm in my answering that question. I lived with my uncle, Mr. Oliver Langton, at the Briary.”

“ Then you are the same, the one whom I sought. You forgive me ? The ways of Providence are wonderful, wonderful ! You

must let me kiss this little one." He took Mags in his arms and smothered her face with rough kisses. She bore them because she was convinced that he was a brown fairy, but she was not too sorry when he let her down again.

"May I come in, madam?" said Keyes. "I have a great deal to say to you."

Now Ursula was a very reticent person and exceedingly reserved as regarded strangers. She also would, under ordinary circumstances, have greatly resented the fact that Keyes had kissed her little daughter. But somehow she did not mind his kisses now nor his rather extraordinary manner, for there was something about him which compelled her to believe in him, nay more, to welcome him, and to turn to him as though he were an old friend.

"My dear husband must see you," she said. "My husband is still far from well. Come this way."

Surrounded by the two children and preceded by Ursula, William Keyes entered the presence of Maurice Sherwood. Sherwood was better, there was no doubt of

that. The illness from which he had suffered had gone into the background, but he was just then undergoing the pangs of what is harder to bear than mere illness, that thing which is so desperate, and overpowering great—poverty with its cruel grip, which allows of no cheer and very little hope in life; poverty which means very scanty meals, insufficient firing, bills, debts of all sorts, which cannot be avoided; in short, that sort of poverty which destroys both soul and body. He was not an avaricious man, he had never cared for wealth for its own sake, but he was hungry now, both in mind and body, and no one ever looked with graver, sadder eyes into the future.

“Maurice,” said his wife, “here is a gentleman who knows something about me and wanted to find me. Sir, may I ask your name?” she continued, turning with some of her old grace and some of her old beauty to the stranger.

“My name is William Keyes. I came here from the death bed of my dear friend Jack Halyard. Madam, do you permit me to greet your husband?”



Sherwood held out a very shadowy hand.

"Sit down, sir," he said. "We do not know anything about your—at least, I think, we do not know anything about Mr. Halyard. But, doubtless, your story is interesting."

"Mags, darling," said Ursula, "run away to the nursery. Herbert, dear boy, go too."

Herbert went out of the room, Mags followed him. Herbert went straight to the kitchen, where he ordered tea.

"There's very little tea left," said the servant.

"Put it all in. There'll be lots in the future," said Herbert.

He then took Mags' hand and went upstairs.

"'Spect he's brought gold with him," said Herbert.

"'Spect so," said Mags, her eyes shining. "Faiwies always do, don't they, Herbert?"

"We spoke about it in the Gardens, that's why he's come," said Herbert.

"Let's sit down, Mags, and think." They sat side by side together, and they thought.

While they were thinking, building castles in the air, William Keyes was making mental

observations. He was rather slow in coming to a conclusion, but when the shabby tea appeared, and when he noticed how weak Sherwood seemed, and when Ursula told him that it was not convenient just then to give her husband a change, he could not help saying abruptly—

“You will forgive me, Mrs. Sherwood, but before I tell you anything of my own special story I ought to ask you a question. Your husband wants change, and it ought to be convenient for him to have it, and with your really large legacy——”

“Legacy!” said Ursula. She bent a little forward. Sherwood gave her a smile, rose, and, as he passed her to return a book to its place on the shelf, he touched her hair.

“The gentleman mistakes us for some other people, dear,” he said, in a gentle voice.

“Oh, we don’t want a second disappointment,” said Ursula, a cry rising to her voice.

“A few days ago—a very few days ago—we were the happiest people in the world, for we thought that God was good to us

and had—had helped us—then there came a blow. Kind sir—for I know you are kind—don't disappoint us a second time!"

"I don't mean to, but I don't understand matters myself. You are the Ursula I am looking for, and a legacy has been left to you. Now, listen. I will tell you all about it."

The tea was forgotten as it cooled in the tea cups while Ursula and her husband hung upon the stranger's words.

"There was a man," said William Keyes, "who loved your mother, Mrs. Sherwood. She married another, and he never told her how dear she was to him. He went to New Zealand, to Australia, to Auckland, to those great tracts of unknown country, and bit by bit, slowly but surely, he saved gold. Your mother was dead, but you were alive. Can you not possibly recall a time when you saw him? He has often described that time to me—you were a little girl, with a pale face and thoughtful eyes—ah, yes! madam, the eyes are still yours. Do you not remember one who came to see your



uncle, and who spoke with great kindness to you ? ”

“ I don’t remember, and yet I should like to remember,” said Ursula.

Her excitement had faded away, she was listening as one listens to a voice from the dead.

“ I wish I could remember,” she said, “ for I know——”

“ What do you know, madam ? ”

“ That the story is going to be beautiful.”

Keyes drew a little nearer to her. Sherwood also came closer to Ursula ; he took her hand and held it between both his own.

“ What she was as a child, sir,” he said, “ she is as a woman. Beautiful stories ought to belong to her, for her nature is so beautiful.”

“ Go on, please,” said Ursula.

“ The man’s name was Jack Halyard. He had loved your mother, and he loved you ; he spent his life in saving up money ; and all that money was for you.”

“ Why, it is like the fairies’ gold,” thought Ursula, but she did not utter the words.

“He saved a great deal of money,” continued Keyes; “sometimes, perhaps, he may have thought of bringing it here himself, but I cannot tell you what his feelings were, for he never told anyone why he was so careful, so saving, why he never married, nor gave himself the personal joys of home.”

“There is no joy like it, sir, even if you are poor,” said Sherwood, and he squeezed Ursula’s hand, and the rigorous frost of poverty seemed to melt, and go further away from him as he did so.

“Jack Halyard died,” continued Keyes, “and, in dying, I had the privilege of nursing him, and he told me in the long, long hours when he could not sleep, what was pressing against his heart. It was the thought of you, madam. He told me what he had done, that he had left to you the sum of——”

## CHAPTER XIX.

It was just at this moment, just before William Keyes had time to enter more fully into his explanation, that a cab drew up at the little house in Asprey Gardens, and a loud peal resounded from the front door bell. There was something about this ring which was at once stimulating to curiosity and arresting to confidence.

Keyes did not know why he felt uncomfortable. Ursula could not guess why she longed to fly from the room, to stand in the hall to be ready to welcome the messenger who had suddenly arrived at their dwelling. As to Sherwood, he also felt restless, his attention began to wander. He laid his hand for an instant on the arm of William Keyes.

“We’ll just find out who has come,”



he said. "Your story is most interesting, and indeed astounding. You must tell it without interruption. We'll hear first who has arrived."

"Oh!" said Ursula at this instant, "I hear Alice's voice. Alice has come."

She left her seat and rushed towards the door. The door was opened and Alice Langton entered. Her face was very white and her dark eyes looked tired, as eyes will when they have wept many tears and when sleep has been foreign to them.

"I want you, Ursula," she said, "and I want your husband. I want you both to come with me at once."

"Oh, darling, but you look ill," said Ursula.

"It does not matter what I look—come at once—don't delay a moment—every instant is precious. He is dying, and he must see you—he must see you both. I have a cab waiting. Put on your hat, Ursula. Mr. Sherwood, I know you won't cause a minute's delay. If we go this instant, we can catch the next train to Brighton. I could only take him as far as

Brighton, he was too ill to go farther. There is an express train from Victoria which will get us down in forty minutes ; we must not lose it. Come immediately, both of you."

There was an imperative note in her voice—the sort of note which no one has ever yet been known to disregard. Ursula rushed from the room. She met the children on the stairs.

"Don't keep me now," she said.

They looked at her—Herbert's little face full of wonder. Mags contented, happy, established more than ever in that faith which believes in fairies.

"Be good children till I come back," said Ursula. "Father and I are going away with Cousin Alice, and Cousin Alice is in trouble."

"May us keep bwown faiwy?" asked Mags.

Until that moment no one had thought of the brown fairy. Ursula made some sort of answer. The children trotted downstairs. They were so anxious about the brown fairy whom they themselves had

conducted to the house, that they had not even time to welcome Alice.

"*You* will stay with *we*," said Mags, and she clutched one of William Keyes' strong hands.

"Yes, you will stay with us; we'll be very good to you," said Herbert.

"Who is this gentleman? And, children, don't you know me?" said Alice.

Mags, still holding the hand of William Keyes, dragged him towards Alice.

"This is bwown faiwy," she said.

Keyes bowed.

"My name is William Keyes," he said.

I have come from Auckland. Are you indeed Miss Langton? How is your father? Where is he? I want to see him."

"You shall see him. Oh, this is too wonderful," said Alice, "too unexpected!"

Her lips trembled. She bit them hard to keep back her tears.

"Will you come, too?" she said. "You may be wanted, I cannot say, but it will be safest for you to come."

"Then I will come, madam," replied Keyes very gravely.



Ursula and Sherwood entered the room.

"We are ready," they said.

It was with great difficulty that Keyes could unlock Mags' small hand from his own. He stooped and kissed her.

"I will come back," he said.

"Mags, let him go—don't be silly, he is wanted somewhere else," remarked Herbert.

The four got into the cab and drove at once to Victoria Station. They were just in time for the express to Brighton. All the way down Alice hardly spoke. She kept her face turned from Ursula. When Sherwood addressed her, she replied in monosyllables. Once Ursula bent towards her and said—

"Where is Stephen Deane?"

Then Alice said in a low tone—

"Don't ask me."

When they arrived at their destination it took but a few minutes to get to the large hotel where Langton and his daughter had been staying. They were at once shown up to a private sitting-room; Alice then shut the door, and, turning, faced the three people whom she had brought there.

“My father is in great trouble. The doctor says that he cannot get better. He wants to see you, Ursula. It may be necessary for him also to see you, Mr. Sherwood, and you, Mr. Keyes. But what I want to ask you both now”—she turned very white—“is to remember in your interview that he is a dying man; that whatever punishment you may feel right to inflict upon him is nothing at all to the tortures which his own conscience is making him suffer. I would, if possible, crave from you forgiveness for my poor father; for through that road will also come the forgiveness of Almighty God. He himself will explain. And now I will go and see if he is ready.”

Alice left the room. The three who were left behind gazed at each other. Keyes said at last—

“I am glad it is turning out this way. I am glad, Mrs. Sherwood, that he will tell you himself. And we ought to be forgiving, more especially to those who are about to die. We don't know, we—who have not been tempted—what the tempta-

tions of others are. That is how I take it. I myself could not commit the sins of some men. I think of it like this—their temptations are not mine. But then, on the other hand, I might do the sort of things that they would not be guilty of, for my temptations are not theirs. That is how I look at it. I have always done so; it makes life a lot more simple—at least, so it seems to me.”

Ursula went up to Keyes and took his hand. She looked into his face, and tears brimmed to those lovely eyes, which Hal-yard had dreamed about, and which had been to him at once his vision and his morning star.

“When you look at me like that,” said Keyes, “I seem to understand why Hil-yard gave up all his life—and he was as fine a chap as ever breathed—to a slip of a child, as you were when he saw you last.”

“Ursula, come——” called Alice from the doorway.

Ursula went at once. There was a large room, with massive furniture. In the centre of the room was a narrow brass bedstead,



and in the bed, supported by many pillows, lay Oliver Langton. He was breathing hard and looking round him fearfully, from time to time. When Ursula came in, she heard him say—

“There, now, mother; you needn’t reproach me any more; I am going to do it—the whole of it. I told Alice last night, and now I am going to tell *her*. After that, you need not stand looking at me with those terrible eyes any more.”

“What is it, Uncle Oliver?” said Ursula’s voice. There never was in all the world a calmer, a more sustaining voice than hers. Had she not learnt the deepest lessons of love? Did she not know the profound and holy love of a wife for a husband, of a mother for her children? Could she fail now at this supreme instant to rest, to charm, to drive away fear? As her eyes fell on Oliver Langton’s old face, it was as though an angel sent by God Himself had come to visit the miserable man. He clutched her hand and held it in a firm grip.

“I am dying,” he said. “I have not

seen you, lass, for many a day. Poverty has not killed you, Ursula, nor has it taken the spirit out of you, nor—nor—the love out of you.”

“No, Uncle Oliver,” replied Ursula. “Poverty can never kill the love in me.”

“Something else can,” answered Oliver Langton.

He gasped for breath as he spoke.

“There was a time when you were fond of me. I remember the touch of your little hand as a child, and the look in your eyes when I spoke to you, and the wise counsels you gave me now and then. You never lectured, but the expression of your face told me that for you all things were pure, and good, and noble.”

“So they are still,” replied Ursula. “So, God helping me, they will always be.”

“Not after what I have to say. Now, listen. I turned you away. You disobeyed me, preferring love to gold. I was wild with you, for I wanted you to marry gold in order that I might control it and add for myself wealth to wealth. You would not obey me, and I turned you from

my house. I tried to forget you, and in part I succeeded—is there anyone watching us just round the bed ? ”

A fearful expression stole into the dying face.

“ No,” said Ursula ; “ no. Don’t talk if it tires you. I understand the past, and that you are sorry.”

“ But is there no one in the room ? My mother—you just remember her, don’t you ? ”

“ Oh, yes ; she was very sweet to me.”

“ She loved you ; you were her grand-child. Good God ! how she has tortured me lately—coming to me again and again—she drove me nearly mad at the Briary, and then she followed me down here to Brighton. Her eyes have always kept telling me something which I had to do, but I wouldn’t do it. Her eyes kept on telling me—still I wouldn’t obey. At last I—her eyes were too terrible—and—the other world too near—and I—sent for you——”

“ You must drink this, father,” said Alice.



She brought a restorative to his side, holding it to his lips. He took a sip or two, then continued to talk to Ursula just as though Alice were not in the room.

“My worst crime to you is only just committed. I was left some money in trust for you. The business was in an awful state. The money could save it. I didn’t give it to you, I—*spent* it—I saved the firm. A man called Halyard left you sixty thousand pounds. He wrote me a letter telling me all about it. He left the money to *you* in the letter—but he did a strange thing—very unbusiness-like—he said it was easiest to leave it to *me* in the will. The private letter was sent, telling me that all the money was for you. Never was such a trap laid before for a despairing man. There was ruin—immediate and awful—and there was the money to prevent it—no one knowing of the private letter. There was the will leaving sixty thousand pounds absolutely to me. I could save myself, and I did. That was at Christmas—Ursula, come a little nearer.”

She held out her hand as though she

would take one of Langton's, but Langton did not notice the movement.

"The money went," he continued, "and the firm was saved. Then something else happened. I began to hate you so bitterly that I could scarcely contain myself. I hoped that you might be dead. But almost immediately after I had spent the money, Alice—who had not mentioned your name for years—discovered that you were alive, and—and—went to see you—and helped you and your children. When she told me about you, I was fit to do any wicked deed that the devil could suggest, but I never guessed—never for a minute—that my crime might be found out, for I had burnt the letter, and the will left the money to me. But God was pursuing me. A letter came from a man in Auckland who knew Halyard, and understood the real meaning of the will—he said he was coming over to see me about it and to find you. Then I—what is it, Ursula?—what is the matter?"

"Is the man's name William Keyes?" asked Ursula.

“ Yes—Keyes—that is the name.”

“ He has come,” said Ursula. “ It doesn’t matter at all. He is here. I am glad *you* told me first.”

“ Glad ? What can you be glad about ? You see me as I am—your uncle—your mother’s brother ! Well, Ursula—I am dying—but I can’t go hence without either your curse or your blessing. Blessing ? My God !—You can no more bless me than you can bless evil ! I will bear your curse—quietly enough. If I were to live, you could send me to prison—but you can’t now—for I’d die before I got there. It is just your curse—that you can give me ; and the curse of your husband—and—your little children. I will carry them all with me into the next world. Why—what is it ? ”

Ursula had fallen on her knees.

“ Uncle Oliver,” she said, “ the money part matters very little. Money only concerns this life. But that dreadful feeling in your heart ! Oh, you must not keep it there any longer—to feel as you feel now is like being in hell ! ”



“It is—lass. Oh, don’t look at me with those eyes !”

“But I must look at you, and you must look back again at me. Oh, I am so sorry for you ! and sorrow makes me love you—and love shines out of my eyes.”

She took his unwilling hand and stroked it softly between both her own.

“Curse you ?” she continued. “I would not curse the meanest wretch on earth—and you were my mother’s brother. And once—before the love of gold made your heart so hard—you were good to me. Forget the gold now, and let love come back into your heart. You need not see my husband, nor William Keyes—only just Alice and me. And Alice and I both love you. Love us back. I forgive you—she forgives you—God forgives you.”

“What a wonderful voice you have,” said the old man, “and—but I can never set things right,” he added.

“Forget about the gold—and this world ; think only of God, and—of love.”

A change passed over the queer, distorted, agonised face. It seemed as though some-

thing very hard and very devilish went out of it, and the restless old hand lay quite calm between Ursula's. Suddenly the eyes lit up with a smile. But Oliver Langton was not glancing at Ursula ; he was looking beyond her.

"Why, mother," he said suddenly, "must I go to bed so early to-night? And must I say my prayers at *your* knee?"

The tremulous voice broke, the breath came faster, but the eyes remained fixed—as though they were the eyes of a child—on something which neither Ursula nor Alice could see.

"Is it the old prayer to-night, mother? Forgive us our—*sins*—as we—forgive——"

## CHAPTER XX.

OLIVER LANGTON died with his hand in Ursula's, and his eyes still fixed on the shadowy form which neither Alice nor Ursula could see. When he was dead, Alice wept most bitterly; all the fortitude of the last week deserted her; her pain of mind and body seemed greater than she could bear. But for Ursula, she could scarcely have endured the great agony of her mind. But Ursula, who was born into the world to soothe those in trouble and to comfort and help those in pain, took Alice into her very heart of hearts.

“I feel sure that God has forgiven your father. He did wrong, terribly wrong, but when he confessed to me he repented, and oh, Alice—at the very last it does seem as though his own mother helped him. I



don't feel unhappy about him any longer, but now we must think of you."

"Nothing in my life matters," said Alice. "I cannot get over the horror of that confession. I don't know what I am to do for you, Ursula."

"If I am not unhappy myself, and if my dear husband does not care in the very least for paltry riches, why should you break your heart, Alice?"

Ursula said words like these day after day as she sat by Alice's side.

For the girl was really ill at last and had to take to her bed. It was a shadowy, and much altered Alice Langton who returned after many weeks to the Briary.

By her father's will, she was left complete mistress of all he possessed. She could do what she liked with regard to his business, to the Briary, to everything. But for several months Alice was far too ill and broken down to give money a thought.

"Let it alone—I hate it," was her answer, whenever the subject was mentioned in her presence. By and by, however, she began slowly to recover. She then sent for Messrs.

Edwards and Green and had a long conversation with them. They had looked into her affairs during her illness, and very grave was their account of the money which she would have at her disposal.

"Had your father lived, Miss Langton," said Edwards, "he could not long have kept his head above water. With one exception, all he possessed was mortgaged up to the hilt. When the goodwill of the business is sold, it will realise very little. There are, however, two or three fairly promising speculations, and if these turn up trumps, which we shall know in a few weeks' time, we shall be able to pay off his most pressing business creditors."

"There are two creditors whom I want to pay in full," said Alice, restlessly. "How can this be managed?"

"The business creditors naturally come first," said Green, speaking with emphasis. "To whom else do you refer?"

Alice struggled for a moment with a feeling of almost uncontrollable agony. Then she mentioned her cousin's name and that also of Stephen Deane.

“The latter gentleman,” said Edwards, “takes position undoubtedly as one of the business creditors. It is scarcely possible even to hope that the large amount owed to him out of the business will ever be returned, but he will, of course, have his share—a prior share, too, I fancy. But I can let you know more about that later on.”

“And my cousin, my Cousin Ursula,” said Alice, in a low voice.

The lawyers glanced at each other.

“There is one asset over which you have complete control,” said the older man, after a pause. “Fortunately for you, the Briary with the grounds surrounding it, the furniture of the house, the valuable pictures, the library, the—if possible—still more valuable curios, and the vast amount of jewellery, cannot be touched by the ordinary creditors, for they were settled on you at the time of your father’s marriage. Certain properties were to be his children’s under certain conditions, and that clause, fortunately for you, covers the Briary, and all the riches that it contains.”

“Then sell the Briary and all of value



that is in it as quickly as possible," said Alice. "I will pay my cousin first; what is over goes to Stephen Deane and the rest of the creditors."

Both the lawyers expostulated. They assured Alice, as men of law will, that she was quixotic; that her cousin would certainly be satisfied with interest paid yearly on the capital, and that she ought not to make herself penniless. But she was resolved. She was in haste. The thing must be done, and done quickly.

Soon after this visit, the beautiful Briary went under the hammer. The house itself, with its grounds, was sold for thirty thousand pounds; the pictures, amongst which was a Gainsborough and two or three Sir Joshua Reynolds, fetched a further sum of thirty thousand pounds. As to Alice, she would have nothing, but what mattered that?

There came a day when Sherwood entered his wife's presence. He showed her a letter from Messrs. Edwards and Green.

"We are rich people, my dear," he said. "Read this."

Ursula read it. The letter contained a

brief information that sixty thousand pounds had been placed by Miss Langton's desire to the credit of Ursula Sherwood and her husband in a City bank.

"As if we wanted it," said Ursula. "What are we to do with all that money?"

"I think we must keep it, dear," was Sherwood's answer. "In no other possible way can we bring rest to Alice's mind."

"But she will have nothing herself—she, who has lived a life of luxury all her days. Oh, I hate the money!" continued Ursula; "I cannot bear to take it. We might have ten thousand, which would be an enormous fortune for us, and she could live on the interest of the rest. Oh, this breaks my heart!"

She burst into tears. These were the first tears she had shed with regard to the fortune left to her by John Halyard.

"Things seem so miserable," she said. "It is awful to be cursed by gold. Those who love it, perhaps, can bear it; but I—I can't tell you what I feel about that money. The whole thing will drive me mad!"

Sherwood took her hand.

“I feel with you,” he answered; “but at the same time I don’t think you will help Alice by returning her the money, which is rightfully yours and which she must, in all honour, give up to you. By so doing, she rehabilitates her father’s memory in her heart and looks out on life with a clear vision. Ursula, if you and I didn’t mind poverty very greatly, even when we had our little children to care for, surely Alice—brave, strong, young, with no immediate ties—can conquer it.”

“Oh, yes,” replied Ursula. “I know she can conquer it; but that is not the whole. She has also a very deep sorrow. Why has Stephen Deane deserted her? Why has he never come near her all this time? Does anyone know what has become of him?”

“I have thought of that,” said Sherwood, “and have made enquiries with regard to Deane, but cannot get any tidings. I am sure there is a very great mystery with regard to that.”

“Probably other debts and greater complications,” said Ursula. “Oh! what is to be done, Maurice? I feel as though I



could not bear myself. Come with me to see the lawyers ; I must talk to them before I go to Alice."

Maurice Sherwood agreed to this suggestion of his wife's, and they went together to visit Messrs. Edwards and Green in Chancery Lane.

They found those two gentlemen within, and very willing to see clients whom they hoped to make profitable use of.

"Nothing could be more noble than Miss Langton's conduct," said Edwards. "She has stripped herself of every penny—the Briary, with its valuable jewels, curios, furniture and pictures was absolutely settled on herself. The sale has realised, including the articles of value, sixty thousand pounds. That she has given to you, Mrs. Sherwood, thus paying you in full the money which her father deprived you of."

"But the business?" enquired Sherwood.

"The business, sir, alas! means—when every asset is realised and every speculation enquired into—but a small sum to be divided amongst many creditors, the chief of whom

is Mr. Stephen Deane. He, I believe, receives from ten to twenty thousand pounds, and may consider himself lucky to have got back so much of the money which was sunk in the firm of Langton Brothers."

Ursula's face turned very white. She did not speak at all for a minute. After a pause, the lawyer continued—

"The unfortunate thing is this. We require Mr. Deane's presence very badly in order to settle matters. We are moving heaven and earth to find him, but have not yet been lucky enough to get the faintest clue of his whereabouts. The business will not be sold nor the creditors arranged with until certain speculations, which we hope good things from, are realised. But, in the meantime, Mr. Deane's presence is essential. The facts of the case as regards Deane are these. At his father's death he was left fifty thousand pounds, which he put into Langton's business. Langton used the money in very unsuccessful speculation and lost it absolutely. That may have been the reason why the engagement was broken off so suddenly, but I really know nothing."

“What will Miss Langton have to live on herself?” asked Ursula.

“That I cannot tell you, my dear madam. She seems to have certain plans, or, at least, she had when I had the pleasure of meeting her a week ago, but I know of one thing she is resolved: she will not even retain five pounds. All the money that can possibly be raised is to go to pay her father’s debts.”

“You say you saw her a week ago; where is she now?”

“I wish I could tell you. I have written to her, but my letters have been returned to me with ‘address unknown’ written across them. She evidently does not care to see any of her friends for the present.”

“But she must be found,” said Ursula.

“She must be found, and so must Mr. Deane. We are doing what we can with regard to Mr. Deane; but do you, madam, also authorise us to endeavour to get Miss Langton’s address?”

“Yes—I do, I do,” said Ursula; “and as soon as possible. I want to go to her



at once. I can hardly bear myself until I find her."

"Then I will take immediate steps," said the old lawyer, "and trust soon to have news for you."

## CHAPTER XXI.

It was a fortnight later. Ursula Sherwood, her husband, and Messrs. Edwards and Green had spent time, thought, and money in endeavouring to find two individuals. One was Alice Langton; the other was Stephen Deane, who had not been seen nor heard of since the night when he parted from Alice.

There came a very bright and sunny day early in June, when two little people thought that they might walk in Kensington Gardens. They decided that Jane of the squint eye might accompany them, wheeling Baby Laurence in his perambulator. Baby Laurence Sherwood—a king with all the regal attributes of health, and the beauty of babyhood—sat upright on this occasion. He looked the world in the face. No sorrow

had ever yet visited him. His blue eyes were serene, as are the eyes of those who have held converse not long ago with the angels.

“I wunser what *him*’s thinking of,” said Mags of the dimples. “I wunser if him believes in faiwies.”

“No, he don’t know anything about them,” said Herbert.

• They entered the Gardens now. Mags, in honour of the occasion, was in her very best spring toilet. She wore a white hat wreathed with pink-tipped daisies; and a little frock of white cashmere, which showed a considerable amount of dimpled legs; and neat little socks and shoes strapped tidily round her pretty feet. Mags skipped, as was her habit; Herbert’s demeanour was more grave. The three children and nurse went straight in the direction of the old elm tree under which was the seat where they had all sat a few days before Christmas some months ago. They sat there again now. Jane, who concerned herself solely and entirely on the subject of her immediate duties, looked after the baby and



did not give a thought to the other two, who sat close together and conversed in low tones.

“Wasn’t it wunserful?” said Mags.

“Yes,” said Herbert. “The white fairy has been very good to us,” he continued.

“We has los’ of monish now,” continued Mags. “But why does muzzer cwy?”

“She wants Cousin Alice, that is it,” said Herbert.

“Why doesn’t she find her, then?” enquired Mags.

“I expect the white fairy has hidden her somewhere,” said Herbert, “and doesn’t wish her to be found; ’cause I’ve spoke about her to her, and she doesn’t tell us where she is.”

A little frown came between Mags’ brows. She sat very still for a few minutes. Herbert looked at his little sister; then he said—

“It’s very puzzling—money’s not everything, for father and mother have lots and lots, and yet they look sorrowful.”

“They was never sozzie when they hadn’t monish—at least, not vewy sozzie,” remarked Mags. Then she looked earnestly

round at Herbert. "Pwaps," she said, lowering her voice and cuddling up close to her brother, "we had best ask white faiwy to take monish away."

Herbert considered this point carefully.

"Pwaps if we did, Cousin Alice would be found," continued Mags.

"Don't know," answered Herbert. "Seems to me," he added, "that folks is sad without money and sad with money—it's very puzzling."

"It's not," said Mags. "Monish doesn't matter one way or t'other," and she swung her fat right leg backwards and forwards as she spoke. All of a sudden Herbert gave a great cry, and caught his little sister's hand and began to run with her as fast as ever he could across the Gardens. Jane of the squint eye called after the children but they did not heed her. She considered that there was no accounting "for them childrens," and, resolving to keep them in sight, sat still.

The children reached a gentleman who was walking slowly across the Gardens.

"*Dere 'oo is!*" said Mags.

"Wherever have you been and gone and hid yourself?" said Herbert.

Stephen Deane stopped abruptly.

"What's the matter, children?" he said.

He pretended in his heart that he was not at all glad to see them; and yet, that same heart was fluttering and his legs began to tremble, just as though he were losing self-control. When Mags clutched his hand, he could not resist that most insistent appeal, and allowed it to open and close over hers.

"Where — has — 'oo — been a-hiding 'ooself?" said Mags.

Stephen Deane did not make any answer. Herbert assumed a lordly tone.

"You have got to come home to mother at once," he said. "Mother's a very rich woman now, and very unhappy, and she cries a great lot—and father looks mis'ribble."

"And it's all 'cause monish—is no matter at all," said Mags.

"And Alice is lost——"

"*Kite* lost," said Mags. "And 'oo has got to find her," she added.

Stephen Deane opened his eyes.



"Tell me everything," he said all of a sudden. He sat down on the first vacant seat in the Gardens ; and Mags clung to him on one side and Herbert on the other.

"Now—dis is de way de tings began," said Mags.

She stared full up at Deane as she spoke.

"Herbert and me—we went to see Alice. Muzzer was awfu' sad. We took a note from muzzer to Alice——"

"As we were going there," burst in Herbert, "we met a man."

"Keyes was his name," said Mags ; "such a funnish man ! He asked me if I was Ursula. I said I was Ursula's *dir*l. Then his eyes seemed sort o'—as if they'd fly from his head—and we went to house, and man said Alice was not home, and man looked kind o' sowwoful."

"There was a hansom," said Herbert ; "jolly, that was—and we all got in—the man called Keyes, and Jane, and Mags, and I."

"Herbert sat on *Dane's* lap," said Mags, "and *I* sat on *man's* lap—man was *veddy*

nice. We called him 'big bwown faiwy'—we *was* fond of him. We got home and he stayed with fazer and muzzer, and we were sent upstairs to Dane and Baby—we didn't 'like it 'tall. Then Alice come, and there was fuss, and fazer and muzzer and Alice and bwown faiwy went 'way in cab. Muzzer come back arter long time, and said we had *monnish*, but that she was *veddy* sad. And we has never seen Alice since!"

"Mother cries a lot," said Herbert. "She told me that you was lost, too, but we have found you, and now we want to find Alice. Mags and I were just saying that money didn't seem to matter one way or t'other."

"Monnish don't matter nussing," said Mags.

"But," continued Herbert, "we have found you—we would like to find Alice. Where was you all this time? You was to marry Alice—why didn't you marry her?"

"I was in America," said Deane.

Now America conveyed no impression whatever to the ignorant mind of either child.

"Is it long way off?" said Mags, at last.

"Across the seas, Mags—a very, very long way from here," said Deane.

"And why did 'oo go?" asked Mags.

"Because I was very unhappy."

"Had 'oo munnish?"

"It was not on account of money, and yet it was."

"Thought so," said Mags. "Munnish very bad ting."

"Can you tell me where Alice is now?" interrupted Deane.

"*Sade* I couldn't—losted is poor Alice—veddy sad sort o' sing—make 'oo cwy—Alice is losted—we has got to find her!"

"Yes, we have," said Deane, jumping to his feet. "Come along, children, we'll go straight back home to your mother."

Which they did. Deane saw Ursula alone, and Ursula told him the story of Alice and what she had done, and also gave a brief account of her father's death, of his 'confession and his repentance. She told him, finally, that Alice could never mention his (Deane's) name, but that she had put thirty.



thousand pounds to his account in his own bank, and that she herself had vanished.

"I will find her," said Deane. "Good God! was there ever her like!" Then he turned and looked full at Ursula. "I never really loved her until I gave her up," he said. "After that, I began to love her so much that life became more unbearable each day. When her father told me the truth, a devil entered into me, and I felt I could have nothing to do with her. But when I parted from her I knew what I had lost, and my misery began. I couldn't stay in England. I took the next boat to America. I spent all these last weeks there with the cry for Alice and the want of her growing louder and deeper and more insistent in my heart—'What am I to do!' I could not rest in America. I came back, prepared to humble my pride, to go to her, to beg of her to forgive me—to take me—to take me anyhow, for I couldn't live without her."

"If there is a woman in this world worthy of the best man in it, it is Alice Langton," said Ursula. "But she is lost, Stephen;



how are we to find her ? ”

Stephen Deane sat for a long time with his head buried in his hands. Then he started up.

“ I am going out,” he said. “ I’ve got an idea.”

He did not tell Ursula what that idea was, nor did he tell the children, who watched him with intense anxiety from the nursery window—Mags kissing her hand frantically as he marched down the garden. He went straight to where Miss Durward used to live, and was lucky enough to find the lady at home. She came into his presence, looking very shattered and pale and nervous. But Stephen threw himself on her mercy.

“ I want to see Alice Langton. I have come back to her ; I want to see her at once.”

Miss Durward shook her head.

“ You have nothing to do with Alice Langton now,” she said.

“ I have everything in all the world to do with her—she has promised to be my wife.”



Accession No. 1704  
 "But, you gave her up."

U. D. C. No. 5.7.4  
 Date; "I gave her up, but I found I couldn't live without her. I want to propose to her again, now, this very minute—if she means to refuse me, she may, but she has got to do it and I have got to hear. I must see her—I see by your face that you know where she is. Tell me—put me out of my misery."

"Why," said Miss Durward, tears springing to her eyes, "she is——" and then she stopped. "Are you in earnest?" she asked.

"Don't I look as if I were in earnest?" said Deane.

In truth, he did; for some great trouble had swept over him, and his face looked five years older, and his dress was no longer immaculate, and his hair was too long, and his whole appearance betokened intense mental strain and sorrow.

"I have been nearly mad," he said, "and I will tell you the reason, Miss Constance."

"Oh, I know," said Miss Constance Durward. "You lost your money—Alice told me."

"God is my witness," said Deane,



R. B. A. N. M 'S  
High School (Main) Library

BOOK CARD

Author ..... MEADE (LT) .....

Title..... A Golden Shadow .....

Accession No..... 1704 .....

Class No..... B-31 (MEA) Nov .....

..... of the Borrower

Card  
No.

Due Date

..... K. May 29/10/82 .....



